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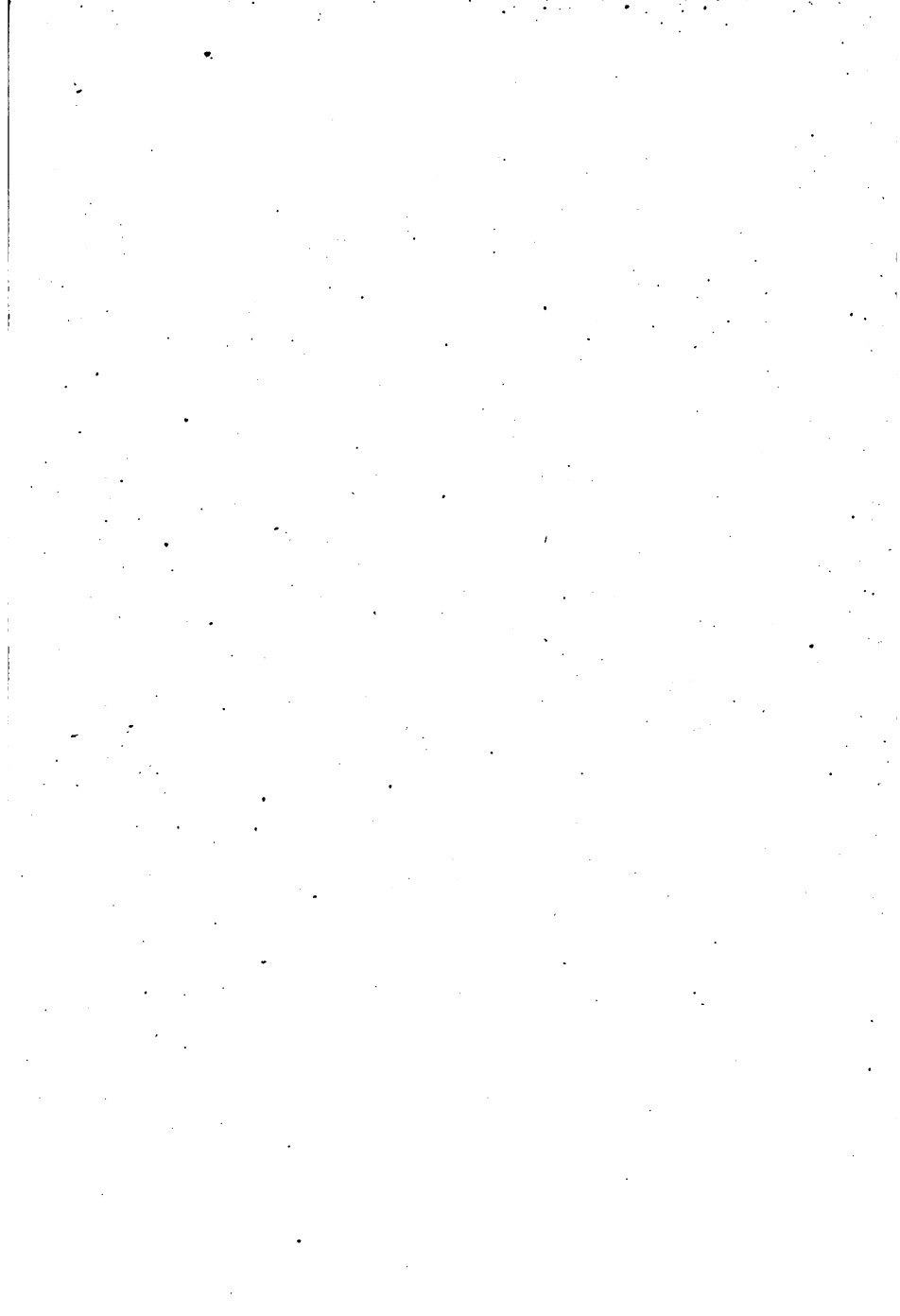
SCUFFLES

SALLY NELSON ROBINS



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"I was going with four babies and a dog."

SCUFFLES

BY
SALLY NELSON ROBINS

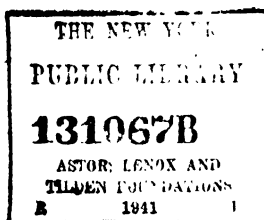
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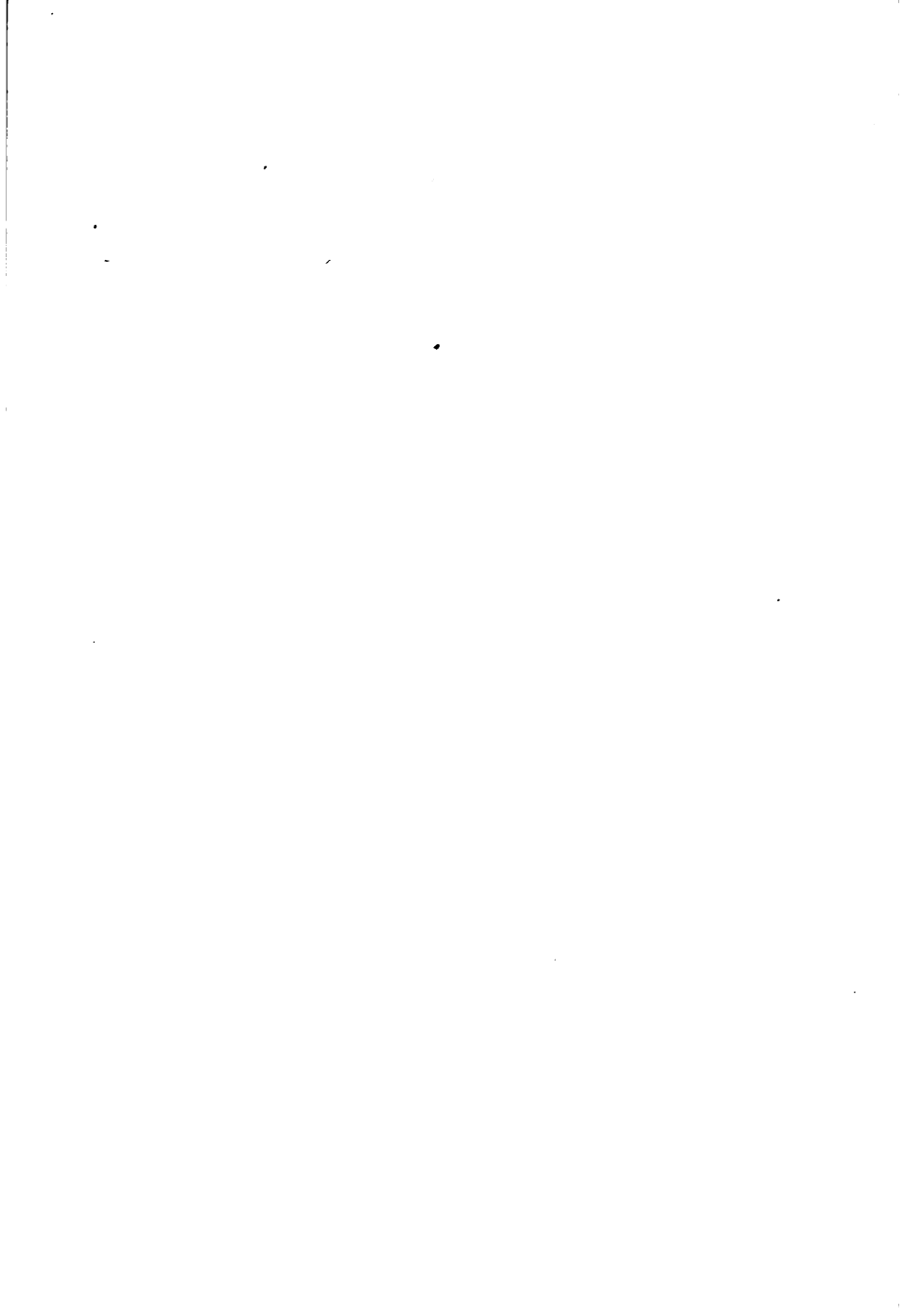
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TO WILLIAM WESTMORE GORDON

whose own little words enliven the first chapter,
and who is "fighting a good fight," I lovingly and
hopefully dedicate this little book.

THE AUTHOR



ILLUSTRATIONS

" I was going with four babies and a
dog." *Frontispiece*

FACING

PAGE

" Stick yo' tickets in my mouf." 40

" You wore my flowers." 174

SCUFFLES

SCUFFLES

CHAPTER I

A SCUFFLER is one who struggles to keep that station in life in which God had placed her, but from which Man essays to oust her. Happily, man's decrees are never inviolate where a woman is concerned, and—a Scuffler is absolutely feminine.

I became a Scuffler at the age of four. It was just after the war, and there were no servants about the place. My memory goes no farther back than a scorching July day, when I with Little Sister, aged two, stood by a high poster bed. Under the thick counterpane our mother lay shivering with a tide-water ague. So violently did she shake that the very bed creaked, and from

dreary remains of the breakfast fire. I took the skillet to the open door, and placed within it my ill-begotten, ill-fed, little red tomato.

"Mine too," Little Sister whispered, overawed by the proceeding, and lay her green button carefully beside my earlier consignment. On the untidy kitchen table was a broken potato masher, which I applied vigorously to the poor contents of the skillet.

My little red tongue was caught firmly between my white first teeth, my young nerves were tense. My first scuffle absolutely absorbed my infant energy.

The tears had left the baby's eyes. Her face was tight with interest as the tomatoes were hammered to a purplish pulp, the skillet placed upon the sickly coal. Soon, she and I, excited and delighted, were crawling up the wide, steep stairs.

"Mummer's dinner soon be done," I chirped.

"Mum—din—don—" Little Sister repeated.

We returned to the big chamber. Everything was still. The form in the bed lay motionless. I laughed again. I don't know why;—but even to-day I remember the quick, nervous chuckle.

"She's stopped boiling," I said. "She done too."

"Done too," Little Sister repeated.

We forgot our mother and the tomatoes and began to play. We took everything out of the bureau drawers, and from the top of the washstand. The wardrobe was locked. Racking our small brains for something more original, we bethought ourselves of the water in the foot-tub and the towels. Wonderful and delicious combina-

tions these were! Each of us plunged a towel into the foot-tub, and applied it unwrung to the bare white floor. Over and over again! Not one dry spot upon the floor—not one dry rag on our small bodies. When the old negro woman who came of mornings, and again in early afternoon, to help, saw us, she exclaimed in dismay—“Fore Gord—what a mess!” She said much more. She made us cry for our sins. She would not listen to my perfectly unanswerable self-defense, “Mummer’s dinner in the kitchen.”

She appealed at last vociferously to the still form upon the great bed and when no response was given, she left us to our wetness and sprung forward. What she had said to us was nothing to the cry which then echoed through the room.

It made “Little Sister” and me wail again

and sob; but no sob, not even the cry of her mystified and inconsolable children, would ever again arouse their sole protector. Little Sister and I were alone in the world.

CHAPTER II

LITTLE SISTER had never been a strong child, and, left much to herself in those confused moments of sudden death, had comforted herself with apples—small, green apples, not fit for use until next winter, and they had not proved suitable for her uncertain digestion. This sultry July day had closed with a storm of high wind which shook the fruit from the gnarled apple trees, and put the hard, green poison within reach of her small fingers. Retrospection always bears me back to the beginning of things—a hot day—a silent Mother—the first scuffle—the first effort to mend things; and with the memory of those days comes also the sight of a dimpled baby hand; plump pink fingers pulling a green

tomato—doing their little best to alleviate conditions; plump pink fingers—soon to be turned to wax, would nevermore pick another green tomato.

On that day a little child became a scuffler.

Years went by. The four-year-old child in the house of strangers, evolved into the girl of eighteen.

She had thought much, had done much in her narrow way, and now, she forced herself to believe that she loved much.

Julian Threshley was a big Apollo. I was a lithe, vibrant woman. The sex in him cried to the sex in me, and the sex in me responded. I, poor innocent, thought it was soul, when it was only sex. It must be both sex and soul for the best results, but it is difficult for the young to unravel these mysteries.

Julian owned a big, bare house from which various members of the family for several generations had removed legacies in the form of furniture, china and silver. Nothing had ever been replaced. There had been trees on the large lawn, but age and storm, and the constant rubbing of untrammelled animals had destroyed most of them. Woods surrounded the place, but never a young tree had replaced the old ones. Tombstones dating back to 1664 lay broken against the barn; nobody knew where the ashes of those they memorialized were. However, instead of dismaying me, these dispiriting facts slapped my sensibility like an icy wind, and aroused a latent vigor—a tremendous determination to scuffle—to repair—to renew. Love pledged itself for combat and for victory.

Innumerable and unexpected forces

armed themselves against me. Julian loved to hunt the fox. I suspected that he also liked several other things, but I never spoke of them. What was the use?

Theodora, our daughter, came in June. Francis appeared—less welcome—the next June, and Alexander the next. He was scarcely recognized, and Matthew, in consequence, did not make his appearance until a year later the following September, making Theodora just three years and three months older than Matthew, and myself a wife and four times a mother in five years. I was downhearted, but not at all dismayed. I was born to scuffle as the sparks fly upward, and there was force within my soul to make my calling and election sure.

When Matt was two years old, I received my first and only legacy. An aunt died and left me five hundred dollars, and while

I rejoiced over this unexpected windfall, and wondered exactly what use I should make of it, Julian, sinewy and merry, rode forth to chase the fox. He missed a fence and a ditch and his skull was crushed against a tree. Agony in time, gave way to expediency. Every acre of the land—every shingle of the fine old house, was freighted with mortgage. How could I scuffle there?

I extricated myself from the tradition of ages—from every local idea. I wrenched myself free from all of my life's prejudices. I determined to pursue an entirely new line of scuffles. I was going to Bolingbroke to keep a boarding-house. I knew how to make splendid cakes and things. I was going with four babies, five hundred dollars, a box of silver, some mahogany furniture, a few family trifles and a dog. I was going with Quetta and Calline, my two black

servants, for protection. I was going to burn my bridges and enter the enemy's country. In short, I was going to scuffle—for education, position, food and raiment.

I did not minimize the risk. I faced the black uncertainty. I had either to scuffle or to accept ignominious dependence. I chose scuffles and that meant that I had either to scuffle where I was born, where tradition opposed feminine enterprise, or elsewhere. I determined to seek a new field. I veered from my position, but not from my intention. I was going to scuffle—and to succeed.

CHAPTER III

DOES not the Best Book say there is wisdom in counselors? and is not there an old saw that avers that "two heads are better than one if one is a sheep's head?"

I had *no* counsellors. My kinsfolk and acquaintances were eloquent with shrugs and groans and hands held high in horror, but they forbore to offer either suggestions or advice. If I was set upon being a scuffler—why should they interfere?

Quetta was the sheep's head. She swore she would stand by me through thick and thin, although she confidently expected it would be thin—very thin.

If I had been a weeping widow—limp and hysterical—I should have found more mercy; but I was a scuffler, and the general

verdict, mixed with funereal deprecation, was, "Let her scuffle."

Quetta had to take Calline too, for Calline was all she had. Calline was an eyesore and a vagabond. She owned Quetta as her mother, but was not ashamed to say, "I ain't nebber had no reglar father."

Quetta persisted in asking me day after day, "How do you know you ought to go, Miss 'The'?" And my vague answer always made her preach. "You got faith, Miss 'The,' but you wants knowledge; you wants to *know* you ought to go. Faith is all right in the Bible; dar it moves mountains—*mountains*, but where else? Knowledge is what *you* wants. Faith is for Sundays. Knowledge is best for ev'vy day—specially when dere's little chillern. Brer Ed Page, he preach las' Sunday on '*Faith and Knowledge*.' He say, 'See Sis Sally

Jones a settin' dar now, her five chillern 'long side her? She's certain dey is hern and *dat's knowledge*. Brer Billy Jones he settin' dare too, he thinks dem chillern is his, but he don't know, and *dat's faith*.' So you see, Miss 'The,' when you got a dawg, two niggers, four chillern and madam, you wants to *know*, you don't want to *think*. You arter knowledge and not faith. Howsomever ef you's gwine, I'm gwine too."

I kept my faith and went. Of course it rained when we emigrated. I think it always does—and rain and children and change are so incongruous. We had what my country people call a "vendue," and when we started in a neighbor's carriage for the boat, there was nothing left behind but Kilo, our red cow. Her new master had left her to nibble a little more of her old grass, but she had lost her appetite. Her

bovine understanding realized that something was wrong, and she expressed her despair by getting as close to the red house as she could. She seemed to be trying to poke her crescent horns into the bricks under the parlor window. She had never done this before. If I were an artist and hankered to paint absolute desolation, I should put a failing old house with shutters closed, into an atmosphere of blinding rain, and work in a lonesome, dejected cow for emphasis. All of the blinds, however, were not shut; one I remember, had blown open and sagged mournfully on one hinge. I should put that in the picture too, as pendant to the cow. To get from my old home to Bolingbroke, one must start at four o'clock in the night or stay at the wharfinger's to be convenient. We did the latter, but even at such short range, making the boat was diffi-

cult. The children had so much trouble getting their feet into their shoes and finding their caps at this weird hour; and Calline lost her red flannel petticoat. It is strange what a talent inanimate things have for concealment. They try one at the most inconvenient season as if they understood.

Getting up early gives me a headache, and in this exquisite torture I directed my undisciplined army through the defiles of a short but trying march, and bivouacked it for a few days at a hostelry in Bolingbroke. This necessity depleted the treasury, and gave the scuffer a terrible case of stage fright at the very start.

Quetta was difficult on this her first journey. Her cheeriness was chilled by the "unusual," and she created all sorts of depressing possibilities. She swore that the raw air would give the children "indigestion

of the lungs," and she wondered if "there wa'nt no philantho 'pests' to keep de 'rusty crats' where dey belonged instead of all time bothering 'bout dem scandalous and no count po' whites dat ain't nebber satisfied no matter what folks gives 'em?"

What a good word "Rusty crat" is for me!

CHAPTER IV

WE are settled. The dog, the mahogany furniture, the silver, the children, Quetta and Calline are finally catalogued—so to speak. Faith is becoming serious knowledge. The dog? His name was Beppo, and he was the perfection of a setter dog. My first domestic venture in Bolingbroke was a generous portion of beef. I saw it, hot, cold, stewed, hashed and croquetted. I easily stretched it into a week of dinners. We arrived in Bolingbroke on Saturday, and cooked the beef on Sunday. I had qualms over a purchase of such large proportions; but I calculated that although the first outlay was great, yet by reason of the endurance of the article—the length of time we would take to consume it—in the

end it would be distinct economy. On Sunday night I went to church. I had made up my mind to avail myself of every aid—material and spiritual. I determined to feed on the manna of the Lord, and to make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness as well—which, interpreted in some wise way, the Bible seems to commend.

I was refreshed by the spiritual manna and went home firmly convinced that the righteous were not going to be forsaken, nor their seed beg bread or beef either. I intended to be righteous.

Quetta opened the door. I think she had been standing ready for some time.

"Beppo have ate de beef," she announced suddenly and violently.

"Not all that beef?" I demanded almost in hysterics.

"Every Gord's bit—but de bone. He

did it soon arter dinner, but I knowed you couldn't stand it 'cep old Marster hope you. I waited to cotch you in de flush of de Lord." She unrolled her apron, and displayed a naked bone. Straightway, I forgot to be righteous. I generally do when something happens. I pushed by Quetta in wrath, and rushed to Beppo lying well-filled upon the hearth-rug. He gazed at me in guilt, but also in penitence with his great amber eyes. "You disgusting, greedy brute!" I exclaimed, and opening the back door I thrust him into outer darkness where he might wail, but where there was not even a bone upon which he could gnash his teeth. Beppo's feelings were hurt, and I never saw him any more. Alas! What was that beef? What was the food that perisheth, to Julian's faithful setter dog? I went too far, for I transgressed the privileges of a

scuffler. Some think Beppo was stolen out of the back yard. I think, in absolute mortification and despair—in the fullest sense of canine injury and wounded feelings—he left me to return to the place where he had once known happiness. He tried to find his old home, and failed. I was offered fifty dollars for Beppo the day I left the country. Fifty dollars would buy much food. I lost the money, the beef and the dog, and worst of all, my temper—horribly. Rather a gloomy prelude to scuffles.

Beppo is catalogued “Lost, strayed or stolen.” The mahogany is catalogued “In Library.” By that august and suggestive cognomen goes my front room on the first floor. The old desk with bookcase atop is by the window; it holds in its heart the riches of years, and emits a subtle but convincing aroma. Before the open grate is a mahog-

any sofa, well-carved and capacious, on one side is a winged chair, on the other a candlestand and a low bookcase. On the left side of the door, vis-a-vis to "His Royal Highness"—the mahogany desk—is "Her Royal Lowness"—the quaint spinnet. In the bay window is a fine old table—holding books.

Through the folding doors is displayed a pleasing picture, for in the back room stands a big mahogany sideboard and upon it are pieces of heavy silver. These are visible signs of an inward and spiritual disgrace. Good people are humble. I am not. I have put these things where they are with a purpose—these trumpets emit no uncertain sound—none but the spinnet. I am an "antique furniture" and "coat armor," not a "plush rocker" or "enlarged photograph" landlady. A "Sully" hangs over the fireplace. Sully painted my mother

with parted hair and a pink rose behind her ear. O—how I hate to think of her shaking to death! It always comes between my eyes and the Sully. So much for the furniture and the silver. The children repose in a back chamber, but the sunshine is in it, for the house is on the wrong side of the street. The slats of the mahogany bedstead were lost in the move; so the bed is on the floor and the children climb over the four walls of wood, and “make ’tend” all sorts of things. No money for slats now, and really there are merits in a slatless bed—nobody can fall out. Quetta and Calline are near by. Theodora occupies a cot in a corner. I often wonder what Theodora’s fate will be. She looks as if she had sprung from the womb of a duchess who had worn strawberry leaves to dinner *every evening*. She is slender and graceful, her eyes are large

and mottled and the combination of color makes something glorious. Her hair is nut-brown and curly, her nose might have been carved by Phidias with a "weeny" little chisel, and her mouth might have blown on a moss-rose bush. Theodora is very gentle and very clever. It is Theodora first and foremost for whom I scuffle. She plays with her little brothers in their back nursery and in the back yard, but I say in my heart: "It is but a span, Theodora; you are yet to stand where you belong. Frank and Matt are nondescript little boys. "Sandy" is beautiful—somewhat sad like a penned lamb; sad, and pathetic and merry all in one; but never mind, Sandy! Scuffles will remedy all wrongs. You and your brothers are going to be prosperous gentlemen! I—myself? I am not old. I am tall and slender. I

have large brown eyes, a straight nose and white teeth. Country folk used to call me "smart." If city folk took time to consider me, they would say I was clever.

Where is my room—my resting place? Nobody will ever suspect, except in that land where the secrets of scuffles are made known. He who knows everything, understands how sacred scuffles are. Nobody's business where I sleep! The six good chambers in my house are dedicated to "Boarders" who have not been clamorous as yet. They'll come; for as a woman thinketh, so shall she reap, and I, Theodora Threshley, verily believe that my house will soon reek with the insanctity of "B'oders." Unhappily, Quetta is developing nerves too—and when I confide to her the confusion of my brain, she quickly announces, "Me too, Miss The. My hade feels like 'twas muzzled."

convincing, if exceedingly elastic. I am in mourning—the most effective attire for scufflers. They do well to continue it indefinitely. I am in the second period of my grief. I wear a white ruche in my bonnet, and cuffs. Cuffs *are* conclusive. The moral support of a pair of long, fresh cuffs is tremendous, and their relative value as a social power, incalculable. I had a narrow-minded, conceited widowed cousin, who was always wrong in her statements. I never contradicted her on account of the cuffs.

Quetta and Calline are perplexing propositions. Quetta is faithful and industrious—after her own ideas. Sundays and company are to her, only matters of petticoats. The day she came to Bolingbroke she looked like an enormous pincushion baby or a battered washtub. She stood out six feet around the trunk. The next day she wore apparently

her dress skirt, nothing else. She must be free to "wuk" she informed me. Her raiment was so scant at home—her shape so apparent, that Julian used to sing:

"Little fly upon the wall,
Aint you got no cloes at all?
Aint you got no shimmy shirt
Aint you got no petty-skirt
Aint you co-o-old?"

Poor Julian!

In this decorous rôle which I have assigned myself, there must be no discord. Quetta, trailing a narrow skirt pinned tight below the waist line with a safety pin, is not in harmony with the claw-foot card table which, leaf up, and well polished, stands in the hall. So I am experimenting with Calline but with no success. It is not generally known in my class that I am in Bolingbroke. It will be known soon, for the

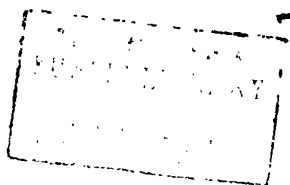
Nicolsons called yesterday while Quetta was washing the front steps. She should have done it before breakfast. They asked if I were in, and proffered Quetta cards. "Stick yo' tickets in my mouf," she asked. "My hands is wet." I am afraid my cuffs will not create a sufficient antidote for this in-artistic beginning.

Calline, I commanded not to leave the mysterious apartment to which she and my babies are banished unless she has on black calico and a white apron.

Last night there was a ring at the front door; quite an unusual occurrence. I sat rigid and expectant in my library. I heard a rush, a scramble, a giggle and the opening of the door. A quiet voice asked, "Is Mrs. Threshley in?" A shrill, pert voice replied, "Cose she air!" The library door opened, and as a clergyman entered, I had



“Stick yo’ tickets in my mouf, my han’s is wet.”



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a vision of Frank in his night drawers, and Calline in another red flannel petticoat disappearing, with audacious tittering up the stair.

When I reproved Calline, she was swift to answer: "Didn't know folks comes out nights; thought 'twas somebody gwine to hut you." Mendacious Calline!

CHAPTER VI

THE ineffectual meandering of ecclesiastical conversation reacted upon my concealed discomfiture. The suspicion of rigid orthodoxy and sentimental twaddle packed into the armor of churchly broadcloth worn by the assistant at Saint Righteousness, affected me strangely. There was a slight tinge of patronage, and my visitor struck me not as a candid man, but a pitying priest full of conventional sympathy for a widow with children. Mr. Preacher! in two minutes I could make you forget your mission. I am a woman, you are a man. Isn't it strange how the mercury of coquetry rises in the tube of age and impecuniosity? Provoked by the desperate activity of the chil-

dren at the door, fully alive to my social gifts and my handicapped condition, and resenting the fate which bade me scuffle, I was stirred with a strange audacity. Not since I ruled over a train of country lads, had I been so tempted to play with a soul.

A concatenation of trivial circumstances, simple psychological disturbances set fire to my lips. I plunged into abstract loquacity which tickled the tympanum of my visitor, although he could not define me. Was I a fool or a philosopher? I certainly was not the poor that he had always with him. For them, he had formulated a simple vocabulary which he could not even remember now.

His reproduction of me interested the members of Saint Righteousness. They were ever on the alert to find something unusual. A pastoral visit from the Rector's assistant (the Rector hadn't much time for

strangers) was the wedge that cracked for me the door of social life. It did not open very wide. The committee for visiting strangers called, reported at the next meeting, and afterward, some of the most expensive pews affected me.

I decided to attend Saint Righteousness for several reasons, all of which perhaps were of the earth—earthy, but to my distorted vision they were good.

When the assistant finally departed, the mercury of self-reliance and audacity tumbled to zero.

I turned to my secret place with a heavy heart. I pitied myself. A bad business! Would I be able to bluff the world? Would I be able to care for four little children, faithful Quetta and hopeless Calline?

I had banked on the sacred stories of the “sparrows and the hairs of one’s head.” Of

how much more value are my careless, dimpled babies, now asleep within the walls of an old maimed bedstead?

Suppose I fail! Suppose scuffles are inadequate!

God be merciful to me and mine!

In the midst of scuffles, success is the only conclusion. When the sea of scuffles calms, when the fight is over, and the scars gleam rough and red—success or failure is not the thing—but the glint of the gold which has been tried.

I soon forgot my brief tilt with the rector of Saint Righteousness; coquetry and mischief, for the moment, were dead.

Quetta interrupted my devotions the next morning by the announcement of the presence of a lady in the parlor. Quetta's ways are interesting and amusing. She wishes so heartily to appear to sympathize with my

poverty that when I offer her weekly wage she begins, "Lord, Miss The! I don't want yo' money. All I wuks for is de praise. I'm ev'y inch a lady ef I is black," but she holds her hand for her money all the time. She is becoming advanced as well as myself; she calls the person who takes and brings my clothes, the "wash-lady" and my visitor "a white woman." As she left out now any qualifying adjective, I was not certain of the purpose or position of the lady in the parlor, but hastily assuming "cuffs" —I ran down.

A vague, inarticulate figure stood by the big sofa, its limpness emphasized by a loose tan coat and a flimsy flowing gray veil. Veils either make the last touch of elegance, or toll the knell of style. It is all in the way they are worn. This veil was like fog on a wintry day. The figure was almost

too limber to stand—too limp to move. I approached it with a smile, but before I could speak, a voice as unstayed as the veil, asked:

“Have—you—any—bed—bugs?”

My brain ticked. I could almost hear it. My thoughts ran the gamut of inquiry. Was she—my first probable applicant for food and shelter—an escaped lunatic? I hoped not. I could not afford to think so; therefore I studied her.

Was she a victim or a naturalist? If the first, I had no bedbugs; if the latter, I must answer accordingly. “Perhaps I could procure you a few choice specimens,” I replied with hesitation, and the gray veil was raised, and the apology smiled.

The uplifted veil disclosed a small, wrinkled stricken face, and a very large, unlovely goiter; but the smile in a pair of

small, honest eyes, invited me to suspend judgment for a little while.

I went beneath her unlovely appearance to the core of her, and drew her confidence, her interest—to me. I led her up my neat stairway to the good, clean front chamber. I soothed her bruised spirit. She had been hacked by circumstances and temperament.

I told her my terms, which she accepted willingly (although she appeared not to have a penny in the world) and in a few moments, she, Miss Arabella Vanderslice, had become my first boarder.

Sandy was in the hall when she entered, and when I went back to his lair he was standing in the middle of the floor—inquisitive, disturbed, determined.

“Have that old lady gone?” he asked earnestly.

“No, Sandy, not yet.”

"Shut de door den. I'll stay here till she do."

Blessed little Sandy!

CHAPTER VII

SCUFFLES are like wire grass and thistles. As soon as one dilemma is conquered, another pokes out its leering eye.

Scuffles have the vitality of a hydra.

Boarders have crept deliberately and abundantly in. 'Tis true I did all I could to procure them, but I was ever uncertain of their appearance in the flesh. I was afraid that I should only behold them with my mind's eye. However I did everything to secure them. I prayed, and advertised and canvassed on the sly. I coyly informed the several members of Saint Righteousness whose acquaintance I possessed, that I was thinking of taking a few boarders for company. For company—forsooth!

Was this a very, very bad lie? And are not lies—howsoever white, very, very culpable? Ah, me! Ethics at best, are wretchedly elastic. Boarders have come, and scuffles daily multiply. Boarders are a distinct and curious type. I like to think that prayer bagged them, but I am often constrained to believe that the devil, out of spite, headed them my way.

I possess a man over the dining-room, pendant to my first born boarder over the library. If all the first-born into this world of sin were as satisfactory as my eldest boarder, what a multitude of rejoicing mothers would lift their voice to God!

When I take her money I feel as if I were receiving tribute from a bloodless babe; but I cannot afford to refuse it. I feel as if her weak life were a painful sacrifice to my monthly need, but notwithstanding my

pity, it is a comfort to know that never a tenth day dawns but her welcome dues fall in my palm. My conscientious lady is thin and tearful; my man is fat and smiling. He has the "Boarder-indigestion"—that is, he requires all sorts of dainties for his salivary glands, and—fills up on the regular fare. It would be easy for me to murder him if it were expedient, but then I would be sadly out of pocket, for he too pays me promptly once a month. He is rich and stingy; he rocks, and sings and dozes in my library every afternoon, and asks me how old I am every other day. Not that I tell him—Ah, no!

He brags of his indifference to woman. I could make a driveling fool of him in a week. The devil has suggested that I try my hand on him, or rather my eyes; but coquetry is forbidden the scuffler.

The third story is occupied by Mrs. Redd, her widowed daughter, Mrs. Green, little Sally Green, aged four, and William Green, aged fourteen. There have been other little patches of verdure in this gap of ten years, and a father Green, but the icy Reaper withered them—to their own comfort perhaps; leaving only useful and tearful memories.

I was informed by Mamma and Grandma Green that they desired board for themselves, William and the “baby.” “Baby” took only milk which they would supply. The size of “Baby” surprised me; she seemed, to my understanding, far beyond the “milky way.”

In a few days Grandmamma sweetly asked that “Baby” might come in the dining-room for milk. It would be so much better for *me*, because then neither she nor “Daugh-

ter" would have to watch "Baby," and the servants would not be kept waiting. I consented unwisely. At first, "Baby" gulped her milk and a bit of cold bread—pinched from Mamma's and Grandmamma's loaf; gradually tid-bits passed from Grandmamma's and Mamma's plates into "Baby's" willing lips. These tid-bits were good to the taste, and "Baby," strengthened by them, grew irrepressible. She went from chair to chair, and stood expectant. Parental remonstrance was unheeded. Each boarder made a choice contribution to "Baby's" silent but compelling importunity, and Mamma and Grandmamma smiled. This continued action became embarrassing, even to such professional boarders as Grandmamma and Mamma, and Grandmamma frowned, and whispered something in "Baby's" ear; but "Baby," grown strong

and reckless by reason of succulent and forbidden nourishment—pulled away and raced wildly up and down the hall, shrieking at the top of her lungs, “I will be a little dog; I loves to be a little dog!” All the boarders smile, and so do Mamma and Grandma, for I have ordered Calline to put a plate for “Baby,” and into it, and not upon the water, I shall cast bread, and meat and pie. I shall have no care for “Baby’s” digestion. Probably after many days, those various substances may undergo mysterious evolution, and return to me in the form of choice nutrition bodily and spiritual for my own babies who partake of scraps outside the dining-room.

Grandma and Mamma are sweetly unconscious of any ethical irregularity while “Baby’s” hunger and thirst are appeased by scuffles.

Somebody has said (I do not look for it in the Bible) that God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. What does He do to the tempers of the shorn scufflers? For the shorn lamb is nothing, in meekness and resignation, nor in absolute and naked exposure to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, to me. I cannot cry or shout; because such conduct would react unfavorably upon my rôle of refined and almost exalted destitution.

I agonize over the intercourse between the Greens and my own little Threshleys. I do not like the tone of them.

William Green informed Sandy yesterday that his Grandmamma had given him ten cents not to say "dog gone."

Sandy winked at him slyly and whispered (not too low for me to hear), "I know a word worth fifty cents."

Where did Sandy learn such a valuable word? And must I make him tell me what it is?

CHAPTER VIII .

QUETTA is the rack upon which I hang my confidence. She goes serenely and energetically along her own ill-clad way, creating "tasty" food after her excellent unformulated recipes, and making no harsher remark than "Dem dat bodes surely eats." Calline, my thorn in the flesh, has become my bonny briar bush. She has responded marvelously to the requirements of Benjamin Street.

A scuffer must be wiser than a serpent, and apparently as harmless as a dove. Appearances are generally deceitful. Her wisest course is the making of friends. Of course the Wormeley and Threshley connection is advantageous to me. There are those of high estate who grasp my hand in

fellowship; there are others who pick up their garments and go to the other side of the street.

To bridge the gulf that stretches between West Benjamin Street and Noggin Hill is a graceful and popular social feat; but to acknowledge that the woman who scuffles has exactly the same corpuscles in her veins that course under your silken hose, is a species of moral gymnastics which many shudder to attempt.

Cousin Gertrude and Cousin Frances sail up the aisle of Saint Righteousness proudly oblivious of my compromising presence, while Cousin Sally Tabb conducts me to her pew near the chancel, and puts her best cushion under my feet. I shall not sit here always—just long enough for Cousin Gertrude and Cousin Frances to get familiar with my profile and the turn of my neck

and my ears and my slenderness. They are fat, and the lobes of their ears are thick and red from age and indulgence. From age and indulgence modiste nor milliner can hide Time's mark.

Will Cousin Gertrude and Cousin Sally Tabb go from Saint Righteousness to the very same heaven, and will the scuffler be there too? "Quite a mixtry," as Quetta says.

Saint Righteousness has its uses beyond those which are spiritual. When the Methodists and the Baptists, to say nothing of the Presbyterians, get rich and want to dance and be stylish, they take the most expensive pews (they can get) at Saint Righteousness.

They are easily discernible to the naked eye. They rustle and trail, and affect elaborate nods and cruel genuflections. They

prate pityingly about the sects, and proudly about the "Church." They are horribly afraid of scufflers.

I have at last succeeded in getting Theodora's costume for Saint Righteousness. O—the excruciating scuffles put into that poke bonnet and that red cloth coat! When she and Calline fared forth for Sunday School I thought she was fit; but when I got to church I found she looked cheap. My own beautiful Theodora! She was pleased with the experience, and I asked her what little girls were in her class. Of course it is primarily for religion that Theodora goes to Saint Righteousness, but there are also social considerations.

She didn't know the names, "they were jes' orphans." The next Sunday I made it convenient to arrive at Saint Righteousness before Sunday-school was dismissed.

There sat my Theodora with three little moon-faced, be-capped orphans, her gentle face illuminated with satisfaction, for her innocence perceived no difference between her classmates and the fashionable little girls huddled under the wings of their exclusive teachers; but I did. I looked around; in each squad of orphans were one or two little shabby girls. There are some who would have regretted their Theodora's misplacement in silence—not so myself. Theodora did not come to Saint Righteousness to make the acquaintance of labeled orphans. The remedy did not straightway appear; but such things were in the province of scuffles, and would be adjusted.

With the day school it was different. Action was imperative and immediate. Theodora was eight, and I conceived it my duty formally to begin her education.

Nothing was possible but the public school, and to that Calline conveyed Theodora each morning.

My little girl's appetite for dinner failed. I could not explain it until by questioning, I learned that she was accustomed to partake daily of pie, bestowed upon her by "Pearl."

"Pearl who, Theodora?" I asked. "Pearl? Pearl?" Theodora was puzzled. "Oh, Mamma; she's the saloon man's child!"

Horrors of horrors! The traditions of the Wormeleys and Threshleys tumbling to a saloon man's child—and for pie!

Theodora was removed from such formidable temptation, notwithstanding her plaintive remonstrances and her quaint query: "Aint I 'bliged to learn my sense?"

Learning sense is all right, but learning

playmates is better, and if it is a question of playmates and sense—let the sense go!

I am getting scared. What if scuffles make me old, line my comeliness with incipient wrinkles, which mature like Jonah's gourd in a single night.

I do not rest of nights.

As soon as I am quiet, I begin to try to adjust food and fortune. I can't do it. I try to make the children's clothes and trim their hats out of nothing; it is impossible. I write stories which vanish with the day; and if they didn't, nobody would accept them.

And when the difficulties are darkest and the nights unbearable, the devil comes with his tempting: "See the glory of the world—the riches and the splendor! All this is yours." "Draw deep from the wellspring of a woman's kingdom. Cast not the eye

down—but up. Scan the field of conquest. Go forth. Get outside of widowhood and maternity. Spring the bow and let the arrow fly!”

And I blush. I have listened. I am unchaste. I am beyond the suggestion of sex. I fight alone in my lair—the ragged coverlet about my ears.

CHAPTER IX

INSTEAD of boarders ripping and ranting and cursing when things go wrong, they have, by mutual consent, packed all their grievances into one homeopathic sentence: "May I speak to you?" Behind this humble plea there is more than can ever be told. Sometimes the denouement is comic—oftener tragic to the last degree—especially if the speaker clears her throat before she begins.

Miss Arabella Vanderslice uttered these words at dinner, and I trembled. Was the worm about to turn? No; she had only the information to impart that the fat man next door, snored. In my moment of relief, I promised to do what I could, but I can't imagine what it will be. I am entirely too

young to pry into the snoring of my gentlemen boarders. While I stood in her room, listening to her little tale of woe, a carriage stopped at the door, and I recognized the ample forms of Cousin Gertrude and Cousin Frances as they alighted in helmets of feathers and breast-plates of violets.

I could but rejoice that as the neighbors scanned their ample forms and mettled steeds, so would my social "stock" soar upward.

I looked in the glass. I would do; cuffs immaculate—tresses smooth enough. I have abundant hair of which I am justifiably proud. I thought how cousinly and cordial it would be to run down at once "sans ceremonie," and be so glad to see them. In truth, their very presence weakened my self-reliance, and dimmed the artistic effect of my whilom attractive domicile.

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It grew suddenly shabby in the light of "rich relationship." The attitude of these ladies to life, their arch worldliness and slanting, critical gaze quickly subdued my welcome, but I am a game scuffer. I had qualms, sure enough, but they should not perceive them.

Within the winged chair Cousin Gertrude sat in scorn—as if afraid to touch its respectful sides. Cousin Frances stood behind the sofa; and before the hearth, Calline knelt—a veritable *rag-girl*—innocent of either black calico or white pinafore.

Beside her was a greasy can of kerosene, some billets of wood, and a battered and rusty dishpan full of coal. For economical reasons, she was directed not to kindle the library fire until ten o'clock. To-day of all days, she had forgotten it—and postponed the uncertain task to half-past four. No

one who has never beheld such a spectacle, can conceive of the incongruity between a slattern negro girl kindling a fire in the afternoon with kerosene oil, and Cousins Gertrude and Frances!

The dear old desk bowed its head in shame, the color faded from the covering of the big sofa; furrows of age grew deep and unlovely on the face of the table, the "Sully" was apologetic, and the chairs were like fine old gentlemen caught in a compromising position. Cousins Gertrude and Frances were deprecating and forbidding, but the scuffer by divine fortitude, was able to rise above Calline and kerosene. To the trickle of the oil and the rattle of wood and coal, I greeted them. I cast kinship to the winds, and met my adversaries with sword uplifted. I entered the battle with a snort.

"Mrs. Spencer!" in a cooing, dovelike

voice, and, "Mrs. Royall! So glad to see you."

I drew a "fiddle-back" near Cousin Gertrude and motioned Cousin Frances thereto, and I sunk carelessly on a mahogany ottoman at their feet. I raised my eyes to one and then the other in happy innocence, as if it were my custom to greet my afternoon callers with Calline and kerosene instead of muffins and tea.

The fire started with a snap. Calline arose, took the pan and the kerosene, knocked them together unsonorously, and announced triumphantly as she departed, "It gwi' sho bun' now."

My bonnie briar bush had returned to a dangerous thorn. Apparently I regarded her no more than the mote which floated in the sunshine stealing through the half drawn curtains. I marshaled my hosts—I showed

my teeth—I moved my long white hands dexterously along the folds of my black frock. I vouchsafed bits of precious family lore, and although my words fell on stony ground and were choked with the briars of commiserating kinship, the ladies would never know that I knew that they pitied me.

They had risen to depart, and I was glad. Like an acrobat holding on by his toes to some fine wire high in air, I knew that endurance had its limits.

“I hope your children are well?” Cousin Gertrude vouchsafed icily. “Yes,” Cousin Frances added with indifference. Her wish must, with telepathic velocity, have reached the consciousness of Frank and Sandy. I heard the sound of footsteps. Surely Fate, even for a scuffler, would not dispense in one-half hour, Calline and kerosene and two dirty boys.

dey had *no mo'* business in *dat* parlor den de debble had wiv' *sponge* cake."

Rage and mortification assumed the visible shape of a pair of active hands, and the invisible shape of quick and fiery words. These active hands conducted the rage and mortification to the naked flesh—hastily uncovered—of the offenders, and I, the scuffer, felt as if I should never get done spanking Frank and Sandy.

From them I turned to trembling Calline (as a woman of wrath I am tremendous). I asked her, "Why she dared wait until visitors were coming to kindle the fire?" I asked her, "What she meant by using kerosene?" I asked her to "tell me that minute where my new coal scuttle was," and, shaking my long forefinger in her ashy face, I assured her that "she was a nuisance and that I hated her."

The storm passed, leaving me wilted. I returned to my secret place, and wondered which course was best, suicide or scuffles.

Theodora came to me when I was calm; she lay her precious, cool little hand upon my burning cheeks. "I told them not to," she said with tearful earnestness. "I begged them to hush. Sandy broke my doll—but I wouldn't cry."

She was the blessed comforter; the little candle that shed its beams upon my bruised pride, and showed me I, too, was wrong.

I went out for reparation, and bought Theodora another doll. A mean, cheap thing, unworthy of Theodora. "It is such a little doll," I said in apology, "but Mother couldn't—"

"Never mind," she answered, raising her eyes full of tenderness and understanding too, to mine, "It is a one."

CHAPTER X

PEOPLE, and especially female people, may be divided into two classes; those who speak and those who listen; those who take an interest in you, and those who require you to take an interest in them. Those who speak—who demand your interest in them—are always telling of their children, their husbands, their triumphs, their “things,” their diseases and their pedigree—especially *their pedigree*.

Some of my boarders have pedigrees and some have not; all have diseases. The boarders who have come in lately and occupy the little back rooms opening on the side porch, have pedigrees. Mrs. Green and Mrs. Redd have only diseases. My first boarder has pedigree too—but she has never

mentioned it. One of my pedigree boarders spoke "flat" when she first arrived, but lately she has assumed the broad "A." This Mrs. Green resented in her daily confidences to me. I assume an armed neutrality of which Mrs. Green disapproves. I did listen, but I do not condemn. Mrs. Green wants open sympathy and she has made up her mind to have it. She will not stand that broad "A" in silence another day. At dinner she asked Mrs. Anderson "of-the-back-room-on-the-porch" if she always spoke "broad." Mrs. Anderson was evasive. "I'd like to," she replied.

"Why?" asked Mrs. Green fiercely.

"Because—" Mrs. Anderson began, and then contracting her parched little face, she asked: "Do you really wish to know?"

"Of course I do," said Mrs. Green.

"Well, if you really wish to know, I'll

tell you. I wish to use it because it is the vernacular of well-bred people."

This remark caused much effort on the part of Mrs. Anderson, who is of a timid nature. Mrs. Green glanced over the table and emitted a gamut of irritating amusement, in which half of the table joined.

"But Mrs. Anderson! you talked flat when you first came." Mrs. Green is courageous, else she never would have hurtled "Baby" upon my bounty.

"Maybe I did," said Mrs. Anderson hotly; "but my grandfather didn't," and the other half of the table laughed.

There is something awful to pay with Mrs. Green's grandfather.

In this way, several elements of my ménage have succeeded in getting up factions—and all about the broad "A." They didn't care in the least what the first cause was,

their aimless existences simply demanded excitement, and the broad "A" was convenient. Strained relations have set in, and there is an undercurrent of discontent which threatens my purse. I hear the various sides of the question, and am in mortal terror of domestic dissolutions. I say peace when there is no peace, and so added to my necessary and legitimate scuffles, I face that dreariest of all scuffles—peace-making. I can well believe that the peace-makers will inherit the kingdom of heaven and everything else, for although there are "peace-endavorers" galore, the peace-makers are scarce, and the solitary specimens will no doubt, find their reward. Every spare moment of my life is spent in soothing the household; but Mrs. Anderson *will* use the broad "A" (when she doesn't forget) and Mrs. Green still bitterly resents it.

Mrs. Anderson's looks are against her. She is little and shriveled and affects green which is not her color. Mr. Anderson is ruddy and round with an infantile urbanity.

Sandy fixed his gaze upon them last night as they sat upon the sofa—all of the other seats being filled with silent boarders. I knew something was coming and I mildly suggested that the little boy go to bed.

I saw his mobile lips part—and as a prevention cried, "Come on, Sandy."

No use—the idea could not be extinguished. Two guileless eyes met mine—and a piping distinct question filled the rigid silence.

"Is Mrs. Anderson—Mr. Anderson's muvver?" I hope I am mistaken, but I think Mrs. Green smiled and I also think Mrs. Anderson saw her.

CHAPTER XI

THE final blow to modesty has been dealt by "Hospitals" and "Flats." Several of my guests have had the hospital habit, and an especially delightful feature of my life is the privilege of listening to the minutest details of their experiences. I have been led deep down into the pit of anatomical mystery, and to my unwilling ear has been revealed all the shocking possibilities of the operating table. In consequence, never a playful pain courses nimbly through my supple form, but it is at once transformed into a grim and scowling "itis," a wanton kidney or a heavy shower of gall stones, all on account of the candor of my remunerative friends.

These are trying conditions. To feel one's mental receptivity turned into a medi-

cal slop-bucket is depressing, but greater still is the gloom produced by my "bore."

Every boarding-house has its bore, and one *indeed* have I. She is a good woman as women go, but often virtue is as bad as sin. She loves clothes and food. She has loads of reddish hair which she crimps once a week and it stays. She talks as she dresses in a meaningless, redundant and abundant manner.

In old Virginia records there occurs this statement: "Benoni could never measure a yard of cloth, count to the number of twenty or name the days of the week; therefore he was called a natural fool." My bore reduces my mind to that state that I can neither count twenty nor tell the days of the week; therefore *she* is a natural bore.

Her words are like water, her mouth a generous hose, and she turns the stream on

every passer-by; but all who can move and do not need her money, pass on, and I alone, am forced to stay. So I sit well into the night, and the bore continues her pithless wordling, mostly about her old colonial home and the furniture, and what she used to have. I am afraid I would set a match to that old colonial home if I could. As the night advances billow after billow of sheer fatigue rolls over my defenceless brain; the bore fairly rocks on my vision like a small boat on a choppy sea. I smile with my lips, and curse with my heart, and cry within me, "Must I give all this in exchange for the money that perisheth?"

The smooth syllabub sentences float on. My eyes reel—I nod. The breath of the bore is caught suddenly again and again for very pleasure. She chuckles at her thin recitals, and as the clock strikes twelve, she

"Of these also is the Kingdom of Heaven."

"Where are those who have bored me?"
I asked.

St. Peter shrugged his shoulders, and passed from me in his full flowing robes.

His shrug was illuminating eloquence.

This was truly in a dream. And one's dreams are inexplicable. Sometimes they come true.

CHAPTER XII

THERE is a young male boarder in one of the back rooms who has paid me only twenty dollars in six months. He has dimples, and a mild "skim milk" face. He has a fine appetite and his dimples open and shut as he chews. No one would believe that he didn't pay to look at him. He has such a gentle, cherubic face which should indicate absolute sincerity. The lady who last boarded him says he lives by threats.

I have been afraid of him ever since. To live by threats, suggests daggers and pistols and tomahawks. Where does this young gentleman conceal his weapons, and if he is dangerous, how can one read character by a countenance?

It is his custom to inform his landlady that if she asks for his penny, he will give her his corpse. Horrible! My tongue, in consequence, is completely tied.

I would not be the real cause of self-destruction—so I watch him carefully, storing Quetta's tid-bits within his lean physiognomy—and resent it. He is my enemy; why should I succor him? But again St. Paul says: "If thine enemy hunger, *feed him*; if he thirst, give him drink, for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." I would gladly put red coals on Dimples' head, but food and drink are a queer sort of coals to me. However, St. Paul was wise, and there is a certain kind of satisfaction in following his excellent advice, so I suppose my food and drink are coals of fire, if St. Paul thus avers, and I shall continue to heap them upon "Dimples." At

least I thought I should until yesterday when I had turkey and mince pie; then I came to the conclusion as I saw "Dimples" dextrously dissipating these toothsome morsels, that no imagination or chemical process could change them into coals of fire. They are the sweat of my brow—water rather than fire—and no such sacred libation shall be poured upon "Dimples' " ingratitude. I asked him for a moment, and stated my case. He looked at me in painful surprise, in offended innocence. "Have you read the 'Fruit of the Tree?'" he asked sadly, and turned away.

This morning Quetta came toward my lair with an ominous tread, similar to her movement when the butter is out, and the breakfast relish hasn't come, but a great deal more ominous.

"Miss The!—Mr. Dimples—"

"Has killed himself?" I asked, tumbling to meet her.

"Calline hear him breathing, and she peeped in, and she say he doin' funny."

Plaits hanging and kimona flowing, I rushed to him. He *was* indeed doing funny; breathing like a motor boat, swelled as if stung by bees, totally unconscious while on the mantel lay a note: "Took twenty grains of chloral at eleven o'clock to induce sleep." The house was roused—a medley of pajamas, night-dresses, skimpy hair, no teeth—and drowsy curiosity rushed in to contemplate Dimples' dying. He puffed like a steamboat for thirty-six hours and finally was resuscitated. By his mean action two things have been accomplished. I shall continue to heap gratuitous coals of fire upon, or rather within, Dimples, and the household is once more reduced to har-

mony. As a whole, it demands to know why Dimples tried to kill himself, and the broad "A" is entirely forgotten.

The unfortunate action of Dimples mystifies Quetta. Existence even in my kitchen is sweet to her. "He ought to know," she deposes, "that natchell life is all we got and that fear of death is more'n talk. Better wait here twell ole Marster call."

Quetta affects the garb of widowhood as well as myself and is fond of talking about "*Lysses*," her husband, with reproachful regret. "Ef he hadn't lammed Calline, and I hadn't lammed * him and he hadn't went to the Court House and got drunk, and come home and fell in the mill pawn—he'd be a living now." And she sighs a sort of incantation which harmoniously expresses the lamming, and the drinking and the drown-

* To lam means to beat—to strike—in negro vernacular.

ing; and creates a kitchen oratorio of no mean melody and realism.

All scufflers are acquainted with the parcels of impossible second-hand raiment bestowed by their opulent friends and relations.

These offerings are often ill-placed. Opera cloaks sometimes go to country ladies of simple and rural tastes and ball gowns to those whose chief recreation is the weekly attendance at church. Fat folk receive lean garments and thin folk trappings of unusual size. Of course extra dimensions can be reduced and are not altogether useless.

To me has been lately sent a scarlet bonnet and blouse of ancient brew I must confess—but also of exquisite shape and texture. I showed them to Quetta and assured her that if she were not in mourning

these lively articles of dress would be hers.

Her air was positively coquettish,—she rolled her eyes and careened her neck and at last said with fetching finality: “Miss The! I ’bout decided to take off mo’ning from my wase up.”

CHAPTER XIII

ONE of the hardest trials of my existence is the reconciling of the depravity of people to the omnipotence of God.

There is Cousin Gertrude, to whom I have been a blank for months, who suddenly indites me a rather loblolly epistle. Not so frigid as herself, nor nearly as limpid as cousinship demands; but just about the consistency of "bonny-clabber" — *whey-ey bonny clabber*.

DEAR THEODORA:

Would not your children like a little dog for a pet? We have a precious little beauty, for whom we have a peculiar fondness; and knowing how children generally like dogs, I am wondering if you would not care to have our dogkin while we are at the seashore.

I always dislike to trust our animals to servants.

Hoping that you and the children are very well,
I am

Your cousin,

GERTRUDE.

When I asked my babies if they would like to have Cousin Gertrude's dog visit them, they—either remembering or fancying they remembered—our lamented Beppo, piped in unison, "Yes—yes, indeed!" How blessed the enthusiasm of even a scuffler's child!

For several days they anxiously demanded: "When is our little dog coming?" I always corrected them—"Cousin Gertrude's dog."

In a few days, Cousin Gertrude's pompous coachman handed to my Calline at the door, a little black cur dog; apparently in imminent danger of motherhood.

A dogkin, indeed! Rather a battered and middle-aged canine grass-widow!

"The old cats!" I said in my heart, while Theodora, Frank, Sandy and Matt tussled for the dog; crooning their precious tender-

ness to the plump but appreciative waif. O, the sacred tenderness of a little child!

The dog was a pure, unresisting pleasure to them. I cannot deny it, and the sight of my oft-times chastened brood so happy over a trivial acquaintance, reconciled me to Cousin Gertrude's duplicity, and I comforted myself, my busy self, with the thought, if the worst came to the worst—if the unavoidable happened—there was the canal and the bathtub.

Two weeks passed, and although I knew my cousins had returned, they gave no summons for their dog; and one day as I sat and trimmed a hopeless bonnet, I was informed by Calline that a "white man" desired my presence at the front door. I lay the bonnet aside, looked in the glass, assumed the cuffs, and went down. I beheld a very large policeman with a countenance of stone—red

stone—such as one sees in the jaws of the Grand Canyon.

“Good-morning,” from me, gently and with conciliation. I suspected difficulty.

“Have you a dawg?” gruffly, from him.

“No,” firmly, from me; then a guilty flush and a halting correction. “At least, *I* haven’t a dog, but my cousin’s dog is here until—”

The red stone face became sufficiently human to indicate that it perceived my effort at deception, and a large hand grasped a pencil and recorded something in a narrow book extracted from a large hip pocket. Everything was large about this “white man,” even his voice, as he gruffly remarked, “Good-day, Madam.” His was not a friendly farewell, but rather a great, big warning of trouble ahead. Yet what trouble could ensue from the exercise of

hospitality to a little dog? If Lulu were a human being, there might be a summons to court for inconstancy and that ilk, but Lulu was a dog—a poor little soulless wanton—making my kindness to her and my cousins the more praiseworthy. Of what need I be afraid? I was ignorant of dog taxes and medals, you see, but not so the policeman. On the morrow he returned and demanded three dollars; the price fixed by law as tax on a female dog.

I refused to pay. This was no dog of mine. I didn't have three dollars. Wavelets of reason beat against the obduracy of law embodied in the person of a "three-hundred-pound" policeman, who icily assured me that it was three dollars to-day, but 'twould be ten to-morrow probably. In desperation I telephoned to 500 West Benjamin Street. One of my cousins was

asleep; the other in her bath. A queer hour for either performance. I didn't believe what I was told.

I telephoned again and demanded to speak to my cousins, awake or asleep, dry or wet. I finally gained Cousin Gertrude's ear. She was sugary in her final decision.

"I have become weaned from Lulu entirely, Theodora; your children can have her. Lulu can be their dogkin."

Then it was I called Calline. I was very angry, but I sinned not. Mine was the most justifiable righteous indignation.

"Put on your clean apron immediately, Calline, and take Lulu in your arms—"

"She so fat," said Calline.

"Take her in your arms!" My wrath made me at first unreasonable; then I modified my command. "If she is too fat for you, tie Sandy's reins to her collar and lead

As I went home flushed and indignant, I met a man. He was tall and rather slender, with a keen honest face, and a pair of kind, blue eyes which met mine as we passed, I going down, and he up the street.

The man made an impression on me; his face was so opposed to my indignation; indeed to my late experience with Lulu and the law.

At supper, I asked the table whom he might be.

My fat and drowsy gentleman, fully awake now that supper was at hand, replied:

“ I know who he is. He is Mr. Leonard Beverley; he made a pile of money in South America, and came back to spend it on his mother. He bought a place somewhere in Virginia; and no sooner was he settled there than his mother died. I met him at the club

day before yesterday, and he asked me how I liked my boarding-house. He is tired of hotels. The man wants a home, and surely he can have it, if he sets out right about the matter."

CHAPTER XIV

THE scuffler's worst hour is the early morning when she first awakens to facts.

If a line of subtle questions with exceedingly remote answers does not confront her, she is an artificial, not a bona-fide scuffler. Each morning, perplexities like fine wires dart from my brain fanwise, with more persistence than a polar dog.

It is always the daily problem with plenty of new ones added. Dinners are despotic, but contracted in their variety, while breakfast and supper relishes are irritating in their range and possibility. If I appeal to Quetta for suggestion, it is always "hawg-liver" and "kidneys"; her mind runs to the inside of beasts as mine does (from neces-

sity) to the same anatomical region of men and women. I truly do not realize that human beings have anything but stomachs and tempers, *appetites and complaints*.

Another of my mundane woes is the instalment man. The reader who does not know the Instalment Man, has lost one of life's tragic and ignominious experiences. Nobody would trade on the instalment plan, if the price were immediate. That seductive announcement that your house can be magnificently furnished on a dollar down and a dollar a week, has been the pitfall for many an unwary and impecunious soul. The plan appears easy, when really the adoption of it makes one sigh for an iron cage and handcuffs. My special collector arrives Monday at eight o'clock A. M. Never a rain or snow has deterred him. He could not be sick; he would scorn a holi-

day. He possesses the collector's visage—don't you know it?—stern, thin, absolutely implacable—a “pound of flesh” stare which is diverted only by the reception in his open palm of the weekly amount so plainly set forth in that stern bond and covenant—which was prepared for me on that fateful day when my taste ran to curtains and rugs, refrigerators, gas-ranges and lamps.

The moments that elapse between the call of the bell and Calline's laconic and reproachful announcement, “Collector-man,” are filled with apprehensions and remorse; and often, I would to God it were my hearse or my gallows instead of my “collector-man.”

Take heed all ye who buy! Look not upon rugs or curtains without cash! Listen not to the sirenic simplicity of one dollar down and one dollar a week! It's all the

same in the long run. One hundred dollars is one hundred dollars whether in bulk or fragments, and the scuffler who has it not in sight, had better not be cajoled by a cunning tempter. She had better not trust to the chance of having the dollar to place in the palm of the "collector man" each Monday morning at 8 A. M. The threat of his hard silence is appalling. What his actual conduct might be, should the dole not fall in his palm, I cannot imagine.

The interstices of the day—the periods not given to complaints, weary confidences, unsolicited suggestions and finest domestic strategy, are devoted to my children; they receive the chaff of my energy and my presence, the cream of my boundless solicitude.

Children of the field suddenly thrown upon a city street are as strange and offensive as wild onions presuming to mingle

children's part. They pat the pony; put their profane feet on the step of the cart, and it has happened that they actually got astride the velocipede.

Each violation of my law has been summarily punished, yet my poor little boys gladly suffer pain for a season, for the momentary gratification of the desires of the flesh.

I continually drum into their ears, with a strained and awful voice: "Nor his ox—nor his ass—nor anything that is his!" and Sandy from the fullness of his longing heart asks earnestly, "Is things that's his—'locipedes and ponies, Ma?"

I answer "yes," unflinchingly.

Nothing is worse than a child snob. The redemption of that kind cometh not, even by fasting and prayer. Unlike the poets, they are made, and by their mothers.

These pitiful worldlings have had no lessons in that love which vaunteth not itself and is kind. The little Dobbsses vaunt, and preen and stare. Were they made by an all-wise God to discipline the small Threshleys?

CHAPTER XV

ON Tuesday Theodora was invited to a party. I thought it was a party given by Mrs. John Gale for her little girl about Theodora's age. Mrs. Gale was Esther Patton. I knew her long ago, and she has called. I found out, however, that it is a party which some little girls had arranged for stylish charity, and that Cousin Gertrude—invited by such a personage as Mrs. Gale to purchase a ticket—could not find it in her expedient conscience to refuse, and for the life of her, not knowing what to do with the ticket, had wiped out all scores to my credit by sending it to Theodora. Of all this I was ignorant, and my simple heart rejoiced at the prospect of my darling Theodora being plunged into the

circle of the Gales. Her costume was, of course, another cloud in the firmament of scuffles. However, I emptied the scrap bag, and found a piece of sky blue poplin of ancient weave. I fashioned this into a frock with low neck and no sleeves; it could not be cajoled into doing more.

I dampened Theodora's hair, and plaited it, two strands of hair to one of string and let it stand for a night and a day.

When my little girl was ready, I thought she looked sweet even if her hair was a trifle fly-about. I took her to Mrs. Patton's very door—adjuring her the meanwhile—to observe this and that fine point of good-breeding.

Theodora was sad when she returned, and entirely without enthusiasm. When I pressed her, she reluctantly vouchsafed the information that when the maid let her in,

she exclaimed: "My! you is crimped," and that all the girls informed her, "nobody ever wore low neck to pay-parties." "It was a little party," she added, "but a long, long party, and I was lonesome like I am in Sunday-school."

One of my children comes to table at each meal for manners; and this is often a time of embarrassment.

Sandy is the most delectable small boy on earth. As the son of a millionaire he would be perfect; as the son of a scuffler, he lacks meekness. He comes in with his rosy face bearing unmistakable evidence of ivory soap and a good rough rag, his eyes big with interest, his appetite keen, and the hope in his little heart that he will, by hook or crook, get some real nice morsels; but Calline is apt to economize on him, and often there is muttered rebellion at the

paucity of his share. I have told Sandy that at table children must be seen and not heard, but he has a bad memory. His brain is active; his small body brim full of energy which breaks forth too often in speech. The table talks; why should not he? He makes violent effort to be heard, giving shape and substance to the idea uppermost. In a lull at the table yesterday he announced:

“*The*’ says Quetta say my kitten is a *he*. She named Molly Lou and I ain’t going to change. I didn’t know, and de kitten don’ know—an’ I don’ reckon she’ll ever know—do you?” turning to Miss Arabella who blushed violently, and almost choked herself with a mouthful of beans. “Kittens is kittens anyhow, an’ you don’ know what to name ’em till they is cats,” Sandy continued, his words falling swift for fear of let and

hindrance. A few days after this a neighbor boy informed Sandy that a kitten had nine lives and if it were hurled from the third story window it wouldn't hurt. Sandy—trusting little Sandy—immediately cast Molly Lou from Mrs. Redd's window. The result was what might have been expected. Sandy ran to me, Molly Lou in his hand—big tears in his eyes. "Bwoke," he sobbed; "and a puffly good kitty *too!*"

I suppose he has heard me express my curiosity to Quetta as to where Miss Arabella Vanderslice keeps her money, with which she so regularly cancels her obligation to me, and, in consequence, at the very moment of his reinstalment at table he again transgressed. "Miss Bella, where you get your money from?" he inquired with touching sweetness. "Does you keep it there?" placing his little forefinger exactly

upon Miss Arabella's ill-concealed goiter. Oh, horror that a son of mine should hurt in public, an afflicted gentlewoman!

Anybody else would have given notice—but Miss Arabella Vanderslice: "Don't punish the little fellow," she begged, "he meant no harm. Sandy wouldn't hurt a fly."

In this muddy whirlpool of inefficacy and constraint my hope has never waned. I am going to rise above scuffles. I have no polished and sharp-edged weapons, merely the blunt and rusty tools of the scuffler, but I'll get there. My children shall possess the ideals of Christ and the prosperity of man, and I shall, by "that-of-Him-that-is-in-me," come out a conqueror.

In this spiritual ecstasy, I sit at my library window and study the Square. It is just on the edge of Mayfair. Across the

street from the uppermost corner "Mansions" run to the park, and away beyond—up the extension of Benjamin Street, where, on both sides of the great soldiers, ambitious people have built hideous houses. I chose this square because it was next best, and all that I could do. It is a good locality on the wane. Those who own houses remain in them only for a season; the houses that are rented are owned by impecunious folk like myself, who utilize the convenient locality.

At the corner is an apartment house. All kinds of people go in and out. I don't know the names and I don't want to.

Next door is a stately home, and in it dwell three ladies. They are "folks" and I hanker after them. I immediately marked them for my own, but evidently they choose their acquaintance. Their blinds are mostly drawn—after the manner of those who sur-

vive the sunless age, and of summer evenings I only catch the swaying of turkey-tail fans as they sit in their drawing-room under the dimmest of light.

Next to them are two stately ivy-grown houses given to the renting of rooms. Here dwell a host innumerable of all sorts and conditions of women. They are all scufflers who go forth on their toil until the evening.

If I were an entirely Christian scuffler, I should seek them and give unto them such as I have, and I intend to; but, for worldly considerations, the less scufflers see of each other the better for them.

Next to the houses that rent rooms is the Woman's Club. It is my joy; into it march those of fine raiment; they give me ideas (which I evolve in my lair with the assistance of needle and thread and the bargain counter) and aspirations hardly attainable.

Some day, I shall—perhaps—trail into this Woman's Club. I might make a speech on occasion. I could certainly pour tea and be bored like the rest.

The contemplation of the street, and the fancies which I weave with the dwellers on the other side, is a harmless diversion oft-times broken by domestic interruptions. I see Calline this very minute, hanging over the gate, tittering with "Jones & Smith's" driver. He has the air of a heart-breaker, and I tremble for unwary Calline.

Calline's thoughts unhappily have turned to fashions and style, and I fear also to men. She has gradually grown less and small by degrees, and moves without alacrity or freedom.

Calline, erstwhile bubbling through her clothes, has simmered to slenderness. To-day after dinner, she stood painfully erect

and "distract" in the kitchen, and when I inquired why she did not eat her dinner, she replied without reserve:

"My cossitt won't let me. Ef my dinner went in, I'd hab to git out."

CHAPTER XVI

UNTIL the scuffler decides that the events—which daily make her disquietude—are merely incidents necessary for the building of her character, she is a thistle bent by every passing breeze. When this conclusion is reached, she is a swimmer with head ever above the swirl of domestic billows. It is reasonable, however, to expect that now and again a bold, bad billow will come which succeeds in submerging her head for a moment; but soon it is up, with a new courage born of momentary defeat.

Such a billow came rolling in from the boundless sea of scuffles to-day, in the form of an interview with Mrs. Redd.

Calline had broken her lamp shade, and she remarked at the table that it could not

be duplicated in the United States; her sainted husband had brought it to her from Venice; its mold had been destroyed.

Mrs. Anderson coolly made a wager that she could find a hundred precisely similar right here in Bolingbroke. Mrs. Redd glowered, and vainly attempted to subdue Mrs. Anderson, who, having nothing special at stake, held her ground with wonderful tenacity, and also the sympathy of her audience—the table—which to a man was growing a trifle weary of Mrs. Redd's daily exalting of herself and her things. Mrs. Redd, vanquished in the matter of the peculiar value of her lamp shade, clutched viciously at the irrefutable fact that Calline had broken it; and as Calline was an irresponsible negro, with of course, myself for security, she sent for me. She was determined to hurt somebody to spite Mrs. An-

derson's incredulity. *Just like a woman*—so very like the sex, that I am convinced it is not ready for the vote until the race is purged of Mrs. Redds and Mrs. Andersons.

I have to go when I am called. That is an unbending plank in the platform of scuffles, and up to the third floor I climbed to find Mrs. Redd towering in the midst of the floor with a fragment of a common ground glass shade in her hand. The conclusion of this dramatic preface was my promise to buy in Bolingbroke a shade as near like the fragment as could be secured. But Mrs. Redd did not stop at this. She was angry. Mrs. Anderson had assailed the fact that she possessed a lampshade which could not be duplicated in the United States. This rankled in her inmost soul. Mrs. Anderson was beyond her spite—a

poor, inconsequent back-room boarder—but she could hurt *me*—Mrs. Anderson's landlady—and she intended to do so. This feat she proceeded to accomplish with peculiar agility. All the defects of my menage—stark and hideous—were held up to my blinking gaze. I was invited to behold myself as representing my house—shorn of all polite and commiserating sympathy. Gradually, I got angry too—unpardonably angry—the billows of injury and injustice rushed over my head again and again. Finally, however, I jumped them. As I saw them advance, I grew superior to them; laughed at their inefficacy; became quiet and bold at once, as I perceived, at first dimly, then with extreme clarity, that Mrs. Redd was really lowering my self-respect. As soon as I reached this conclusion, my confidence in myself en-

larged. Mrs. Redd actually looked as small as she was; the scuffler receded, and the blood of the "Master," the "planter," the "duelist," the blood of "Yorktown," and "Chancellorsville" rose red in my face, like a banner unfurled when courage is low. It made the scuffler, in soft emphatic tones, show Mrs. Redd the door—the front door of 214 Benjamin Street, and request her to step on the outside.

"Do you realize that you are putting me and my helpless babies in the street?" she hissed.

"I only realize, my dear Mrs. Redd," I said firmly; "that I am asking you to leave my house. My wishes have not reached the street."

The battle over, the scuffler reacts upon herself. It is winter—mid-winter—there is coal to buy to-morrow (the empty coal

bin has its parallel only in the empty dinner pail). Mrs. Redd means coal, and Mrs. Redd means dinner too. Mrs. Redd departing, creates a vacuum hard to fill.

Ah, the blackest wave is coming; but the scuffler jumps again—sets her teeth—becomes a dare-devil in her lair, and dresses more than usual for the evening meal. She piles her hair high, leaves her throat bare, and clasps around it an old topaz necklace which in some mysterious way is the token of the “Master,” the “duelist,” “Yorktown” and “Chancellorsville.”

I felt charged with the electricity of life; my words, careless and merry, ran around the table, and knit the boarders in a round, red ring of satisfaction. I was charging the cohorts of defeat as the “buff and blue” charged at Yorktown, as the “gray” charged at Chancellorsville. Great battles can be

fought on the red field of one's soul, and the victory there is the greatest of all.

Later, I sat in the library alone. Every boarder in the house knew something was on, and they had scattered for surmises and criticisms. The children were asleep.

I was wondering: "Have I cut off my nose to spite my face?" I was assuring myself: "No—of course, no. What is hunger and cold and nakedness to Mrs. Redd's impertinence? You have cut an inflamed appendage from your domestic anatomy." Then the bell rang.

Instinctively I glanced in the old glass with its three faces which runs under my precious "Sully." I was rosy—my eyes were like autumn pools catching a glint of the dying sun—my indignation was dying—setting—but it was not dead. My throat rose white from my black gown, and the

topazes gave me a certain quaint dignity which I liked. "Pshaw," whispered "discreet innerness." "What use—eyes, throat, soul—to the scuffler? Better far, stupid endurance; plethoric acceptance of all the Redds and Greens. Better far, humble pie than empty room; humble *pies* than empty rooms!"

"You are off, 'discreet innerness'!" my mortal soul replied. "Sounds good, but rings false. There is no circumstance or spot on God's green earth where eyes don't count—and throat and soul—the spirit aflame."

My self dialogue was interrupted. Calline opened the door, and a gentleman entered; the very same whose blue eyes met mine as I led Lulu up Benjamin Street.

I was not as reckless as I was before. I became timid—insecure—but Mr. Beverley

was direct. He disliked hotels and clubs; he was alone and lonely, and if he could have the good fortune to procure rooms in my house he would be glad to occupy them at once. He could not do with less than three rooms—but for them, he would be too happy to pay liberally. There were, of course, Mrs. Redd's rooms! A bargain—purely mercantile—between me and my topazes and Leonard Beverley was inartistic, but his art softened the crudity—dispelled the brazen notes, and made me—sitting in my winged chair with him in the fiddle-back opposite—*made me* feel less a scuffler than I had done since that cold, clear day when Julian Threshley rode forth to chase the fox.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ladies who sway the turkey-tail fans in the large dim parlors opposite me, have called on me—at last. Mr. Beverley was the cause of it. He is their cousin. They have lifted me to the most peculiar and desirable rung of society. I made an impression, *they spoke*, and at once I had visitors galore, whose cards were heavy with rich sounding cognomens; cognomens which I recognize and adore. I am a worldly-minded person—who tries not to be. I have been asked to join the Colonial Dames—ah, ha! and I am to be proposed by Mrs. Nathaniel Bacon Burwell and seconded by Mrs. William Byrd, Jr.—and all this by means of the “Ladies-of-the-Fans.” Hi-yi-Jane! Did you ever know

It is well to go in for some things. Girls who don't have willing beaux go in for tennis and horses, and charities and art. I have assumed the rôle—through the “ladies-of-the-fan,” and back of them Leonard Beverley—of “genealogical purifier.” I have the sudden reputation of being able to discern with peculiar nicety the exact number of dark blue, light blue, pale pink and blood red corpuscles which a woman possesses; (man don't bother about these things—much) and for this, in a way, I am exalted. I am actually invited to a wedding and I shall go. I hope Jane will hear of it—and that Cousin Gertrude will be there. Long ago I have put Cousin Gertrude and Jane in a pit. It is astonishing how much weakness is packed into an apparently strong character. I have longed all my life to float up the wide aisle of a big city church as a

“beyond-the-ribbon” guest. Of course I have been to country weddings but they are entirely en famille. This wedding is to be a fine affair, and the mother of the bride is my mother’s second cousin; she has a very good opinion of the Wormeleys and the Threshleys. The “ladies-of-the-fan” say I am to go with them and Mr. Beverley and sit away up. The vision of such glory has turned my head—it seems a slap at Jane and the discontented boarders. I have gone to “Rogers and Rogers” and purchased a frock without money, but with an *awful* price. Quetta hooked it up last night; she said it was no easy job. The frock is a beauty—long, clinging, tucked and embroidered, and smooth on my slenderness as paper on a wall. Vanity is the last part of a woman to die, and when Quetta informed me that “de back of my back look like a

patch of snow 'ginst de black," I was just as pleased as possible.

There are several signs of my advancing estate. Shopkeepers have invited me to open accounts; I mean stylish dry-goods people, not baker and butcher; with them I have long been in bondage. I have nibbled at the bait so temptingly displayed. I shall presently find a sharp and deadly hook on the other end of the worm.

The clerk at "Rogers and Rogers'," on account of my new intimacies I suspect, showed me some lovely little frocks and things which just suited Theodora, and some sailor suits for the boys; and when I thought how "dear" they would look in them at Saint Righteousness, I pecked at the worm again, hardly conscious of the deadly hook—forgetting that for bodies as well as souls, there is a day of reckoning. One had better have

an avowed and immutable "collector-man," than a gentle and sleek gentleman who drops upon you like a thief in the night and informs you that his firm would like a remittance.

My social favor rather increases scuffles. I am a brunswick stew of pseudo-society, insatiable boarders, awakening children, debts, genealogy, noblesse oblige. A horrible concoction only to be digested by the scuffer. Scuffles are multiplied; more desperate; less easily grappled and hooked. Better clothes make gladder playmates. Then is it not meet and right to assume better clothes? Of course!—and I draw upon the courtesy of Rogers and Rogers.

Hobnobbing with the strong sways public opinion favorably. Then, is it not wise thus to hobnob, or is it better not to hob? This is the question. I am all mixed up in

my isolation; for in truth, I am as alone as ever. The world cries—the devil cries, the flesh cries—the soul cries; and amidst the din is a whisper—a warning which scares me to death. I am pressing to a dimly remote and barely attainable goal by a devious and difficult road. I want to be popular; I want myself and children to be where we belong. I want to be just, I want to be good—yes, I want to be good—but am I? I am in a maze.

The first of every month I throw my sops to my cerberuses. Each opens its jaw and grabs my mite. The fat boy quietly said, “More!” My cerberuses ask shrilly—“*No more?*”

The fat boy slept; not so Cerberus, the creditor.

Each month I expect the next to be better, but it never is. Always I have my sul-

len retinue of those who hunger and thirst;
of unsatisfied cerberi; of guilty aspirations,
and futile efforts.

Theodora looks so delectable as she steps
out in her questionable raiment that I forget
it is not paid for. Still, from Theodora's
lovely eyes dart rays of understanding and
consequent sadness; but I excuse myself by
the truth that what I am doing is for her and
the boys; my deeds are stepping stones to
their glad destiny.

CHAPTER XVIII ~

SCUFFLES have become chronic. Once I thought they would deliver me; I smelt the battle afar off; I heard the thunder of the Captains and the shouting of the victor—me! I mocked at fear and was not affrighted; I turned not my back from the sword.

It is different now—very different. For my little boy lieth under the shady trees “in the covert of the reeds and fens.” The sword has fallen. Success and prosperity and the future of my children have been far second—for a long time. My heart has been wounded to its very core—and what I do now is not spontaneous. I do because I have to *do*; any promise which the years might have contained has faded from my

hopes. I don't care as I used to care. The wound was very sudden; my mind was bursting with unfulfilled but possible social, financial and educational schemes; the children were gaining ground in friendships and personal confidence. Although very few called me "Theodora"—which fact always emphasizes the "wild olive grafted in"—yet, by means of the mobilization of every faculty of body and spirit, I had managed to scuffle into the apparent good will of a very select portion of Bolingbroke society.

I remember too well the evening of the "blow." The children, fresh and glad, were playing on the leafy street just as the sun was going down. All along the square, white frocks gleamed on the steps. I came down in a low-neck black gown. I was going out to dinner later.

As I raised the shade to my library win-

dow one of the Ammons uttered a piercing yell as she ran into her house. I looked out, and there was Sandy, gazing at her contemptuously, his chubby fists clasped behind his straight little back.

I beckoned to him, and he ran in, head erect, eyes as clear and truthful as the evening sky. Before I spoke, he announced: "*She hit me, and I hit she—good!*"

As I bore him off with reproof to bed, assuring him that gentlemen never struck ladies—he was entirely sure of himself, to my utter despair. He had reasons for his action which he absolutely declined to divulge. I often wonder to this day what they were; but I respected his determination as I put him to bed. That very day I had had the slats renewed. I had prayed for years that the children would not be sick until the slats were replaced, and my prayer

was answered. I verily believe that the only thing for which I never prayed was that Sandy would not be thrown from a pony cart. That, I suppose, seemed too remote.

A few days before the blow—he had been very mischievous and I had put him to bed early in the day—the very perfection of his small body was against corporal punishment.

I was sewing by the window. “Muvver,” he began, with angelic repentance in his tone, “How is God going to take me to heaven?”

A sort of prophetic shiver went through my body. I was unable to take the question lightly and too seriously I replied, “I don’t know.”

“I ain’t going to leave you, muvver,” he said perceiving my gravity. “When God

toes peeping from under his little white gown.

"Dress, Sandy; don't dawdle!" I repeated.

"All right, Ma-ma," with heavenly serenity. Sandy was so plausible. "Cross my heart," wriggling his chubby fingers over his left breast, "I'm going to."

I repeated my injunction too often even for Sandy's patience. Suddenly the little fellow fell upon his knees in the middle of the room, crossing his hands on his breast like a picture angel. He spoke in a voice of positive command rather than of humble invocation: "*Gord! Don't let me dawdle, Gord! keep me from dawdling; but, O—Gord—ef you can't keep me from dawdling—make my mother reconciled!*"

He had picked up the long word somewhere—and placed it most happily. He

rose from his knees and with baby assurance informed me—"If He choose, He can keep me from—if He don't—He won't."

These were the last words I ever heard Sandy—my sunbeam—speak. I went—leaving them in their various places, to market; to see Cousin Gertrude about a cantata she was arranging; to have a dress fitted; to pay some bills; to see the dentist and to play a rubber of bridge. I thought everything was arranged for the day.

I got home to find that my little adventurer had been invited to ride in the Gill's pony cart. The pony had shied at the lowering of the globe of the electric street light, become quickly obstreperous and thrown the children against the curbstone. Mine was taken—the other left. Everything had been done, they said—but I wasn't there.

He was lying naked and fearfully quiet

when I came in, on the restored bed. His splendid little legs in the fullness of their baby strength would never flash in play again.

His body, broad and strong, with not a fleck upon its whiteness, would no more stand for good or ill.

I could have borne that—perhaps—I don't know; but when I saw Sandy's face so strangely quiet, his parted lips still red, showing two rows of pearly little teeth; the eyes of truth half closed under long-lashed lids; curls still glad and golden against his too white forehead—when I perceived the irresponsive silence of my shrill, saucy little boy-voice, I was pierced with something sharper than a two-edged sword.

I have never been able to draw that *something* from my breast.

I did not take off my hat. I knelt on

the floor by the bed, and prayed God to make me an Elijah whose cry, "O Lord, my God, I pray Thee let this child's soul come into him again"—was granted. "O God, for me—Thy merest—humblest child; let this child's soul come into him again—let him be revived!" *No use.* At seven o'clock the next night I set forth on a dismal journey. I took Sandy back to the soil of his fathers. I needed more intimate sympathy than the friends of my maturity could give.

Over rough country roads, through thick forests—by beds of nestling ferns which had always grown just there—by smiling ancestral brooks and broad acres once tilled by Sandy's forefathers—to the old, old eloquent churchyard and a band of simple, pathetic sympathy.

The yard was too full for Sandy. It had

been a churchyard for many, many years—and we lay the little boy outside. Our sincere and sorrowful procession left the church and trailed over a sea of brown sedge to a neglected spot by some young pine trees. The wind sighed through them and made a weird accompaniment to the quavering and feeble tenderness of untrained voices. Sorrow turned the two-edged sword, and it tore the very quick of my soul, but the uncertain melody gave birth to something else—I do not know its name—which strangely explained life; threw the values of existence plain upon the murky day. They have never faded.

I had no time to weep upon the sympathy of my old friends; I had no time to sob out what I felt. I could not burden them with the years of concealed and wretched scuffling, seemingly so vain now.

I had to hurry back to the dismembered little flock. "There is no flock, howe'er so well attended, but one dead lamb is there." Mine, perhaps, was not so well attended—God knows.

I got back to Bolingbroke when nobody was about and went straight to the nursery, so terribly eloquent of a brave little life—echoing with his footsteps and his laughter—so cruelly ended. I shut to the door and locked it. There were Sandy's sandals so deliberately put on that last morning! There were his little striped socks almost warm from his living flesh—the bed with its awful indentation—the tumbler with brandy and a spoon—given, I suppose, in hopes of revival—all the shocking details of a last tremendous moment—which had not been disturbed.

I let these mute witnesses pound my

heart without mercy. I handled them that they might do their very worst.

I writhed upon Sandy's bed. I wanted sorrow to have its perfect work. It was late when the hurricane of pain lowered—then I unlocked the door, and went my—silent—cruel way.

As in scuffles, so in grief, I uttered not a word.

Sandy away, has taught me lessons which perhaps from Sandy here, I should never have learned.

He has made me take Jane Ammons and Cousin Gertrude out of the pit.

But O! my heart and Sandy!

CHAPTER XIX

THE trust and security of the child were broken by the great elemental force of death. My mother and little sister were gone. Why should not everything go too?

Julian was sanctuary. He was young and strong. He could stay—but he didn't. The elemental discipline removed him too. Tremendous change—awful shadow—fell quickly into a human life. Action was the only salvation. Action opened vistas—friction created courage—appreciation aroused vanity—*self* became enlarged. “By my stripes are ye healed!” And another blow made a fearful whelk upon my heart—another lash cut the very quick of my spirit. “By my stripes are ye healed!”

Sandy has somewhat clarified my spiritual atmosphere.

Why did I never see things as they really are? Perhaps mortal woman never sees things as they are but at least I see more clearly.

It takes pain to make one understand. The trouble in life is that we whom God has made square, are continually striving to squeeze our corners into a nice, round hole. My corners are those of poverty and pride and disappointed aspirations. I saw life as I wished it to be—not as it is.

In the beginning I thought the world was made for me. I saw my poor self the rightful heir of all good things.

Instead I was made small and very square, by something very great, with a marvelous destiny which could only be

reached in that station of life in which this very great something placed me.

Less fretting over fancied rights—more energy over positive privileges, is the philosophy of life. As other folks have corners, so also have they smooth and lovely facets. To pad their corners, and to regard with pleasure, these smooth and lovely facets is also the philosophy of life. Jane for instance; Jane is an excellent material-mother, and a rather good citizen, I fancy; and was it not natural that Jane prosperous, should take her turn of aloofness to me, scuffling? I had my innings on Jane in her inconspicuous days. Turn about is fair play! Those who give the left cheek to be slapped also, are few. Indeed, the maxim is quite obsolete.

Was it not rather natural too that Cousin Gertrude should dread me suddenly cast

in the veins of that little man? Not only the blood of the planter—the Master—Yorktown and Chancellorsville—but also the blood of the gamester, the libertine, the idler, the drunkard, the coward. Shake the confused kaleidoscope of corpuscles, and look through the lens. Sometimes the good masses wonderfully; sometimes the bad. All sorts of progenitors create the child.

In Frank's veins course the corpuscles of honor and courage and brain; also the corpuscles of idleness and lust and deceit. The lens of my awakened consciousness focuses true, and the sight stabs me. Had I looked well, and perceived well and acted well long ago, perhaps I could have trained honor, and courage and brain to subdue idleness and lust and deceit. This is the mother privilege. Who accepts it? Does the gardener wait until the bugs in their vora-

cious maturity eat up the potato vines before he acts? Does the vine dresser wait till the caterpillar flourishes before he sprays? Why, then, the mother? Why, then, the father? Why the eye shut to the enemies of the soul—born with it—the deadly germs which may be subdued by the victor germs of the immortal self? It is not what should be, but what is. Matt is honest and industrious but dull. The lens of fearless observation shows that too; dull and good; but there have been always the dull ones, and they sometimes accomplish much—for they are those who do their best.

Not should be, but is; the all-conquering, all paralyzing *is!*

I thought I had gazed unflinchingly through the awful lens of *is*, and had bowed my head in humble submission, but here is Theodora with her eighteen years of beauty

—real beauty and charm as I see it. Is it, or is it but my mother fancy?

When Theodora was sixteen, Mrs. Jenifer Tayloe and her young son, Jenifer, boarded with me. She was in the flush of wealthy and beautiful widowhood; he was a youth who had strengthened only the corpuscles of honor, and courage and brain, and vanquished those of idleness, lust and deceit. Satan entered my chastened soul for the millionth time in the form of a matchmaker.

What if Jenifer should fancy Theodora? Why not? She was his peer in all save one particular; and it was meet and right that she should lack, and he possess this one thing.

I heard each word he said to her; I saw each action jealously. I plead guilty—I, a scuffling confessor—of oft throwing them together. Did Mrs. Tayloe perceive this?

Had she other plans for her son and heir? Was it for fear of this possibility that she bore him to foreign parts? If she did not perceive my questionable project, I verily believe Theodora did, for she has never called Jenifer's name since he left us; Jenifer to whom she talked—with whom she walked of late winter evenings—with whom she nightly played cribbage in a corner with nobody very near.

CHAPTER XX

IN the negro heart is a well of sympathy and affection—and Quetta's efforts to divert me strengthen my fortitude. She makes me the confidante of her trouble and her enjoyment. Her greatest excitement is going to church and on Mondays I generally have a reproduction of Brer Jasper and his congregation. Brer Jasper is the celebrated colored divine whose famous astronomical sermon, "*De Sun do move*," attracts all of the strangers who pass through Bolingbroke. Brer Jasper preaches this sermon annually and his collection on that day is large. Quetta is very resentful of any other man occupying Brer Jasper's pulpit. This morning she became very excited over

a very black man who had preached the day before.

“He had no business thar—Miss The. He know too much, He skipped from Generation to Revolution and ramped and rared through the Scripters like a Billy Goat. He hollered loud—and hollering counts—wiv *some*.

“He praught like a Injine—steaming and puffing. Ain’t no preacher got no business sayin’ nothing that *wimmen* and niggers can’t understand.

“Wimmen white and colored is mostly simple and niggers is always niggers—you may put ’em in de pot and bile ’em and dey is niggers still.”

Mr. Leonard Beverley is very nice to me too. It is not just what he says, but how he acts. I blush, but (I, the Spiritual and Material scuffer, am determined to be can-

did) I wish he would fall in love with Theodora. It is high time for Theodora to have beaux, but they don't materialize. My resurrected and spiritual self blushes at my weakness—but daily I ask the “Very-Great-Something” to open the door of conquest for my Theodora, and as I pray most humbly, most reverently, I can but think of Sandy. One night when he had been deliciously naughty, he asked me what he should do to keep from it; and I replied: “Sandy, say your little prayers; ask God to make you good.”

He hesitated and then said earnestly: “Well, I will; but I bet you five hundred dollars I'll be just as bad to-morrow as I was to-day.” And Theodora probably will have no more beaux to-morrow than she had to-day. We are but impatient, greedy children with our poor silly wants—our prayers.

Cousin Gertrude, and why, I cannot tell—has asked Theodora to go to the White Sulphur Springs for ten days.

Her request is, to me, God's forefinger pointing to victory. This, of course, is Theodora's opportunity; perhaps the answer to prayer. Theodora was away two weeks—and I at home sat upon the rather uncomfortable seat of expectation.

Theodora has returned and talks of reading under the trees. I want to hear of conquest—victory gained by beauty. I wait in vain.

Reading under trees—alone—in the hours set apart for coquetry and conquest; for whisperings in glades full of sifted sentiment. Mercy!

I comforted myself with the hope that Theodora was modest; she was waiting for Cousin Gertrude to tell; and Cousin Ger-

trude did tell with a vengeance. "Theodora was difficult," she casually remarked on the street. "She has not that nameless quality which attracts men—she hasn't 'it'."

I hated Cousin Gertrude afresh, and it was all I could do to keep from again putting her in the pit, and I almost hated Theodora. In my fierce indignation there seemed again a small voice, which this time came from Satan's own lips: "It was all the old cat's fault. She was too busy thinking of herself. Theodora has got *it*. Give her a tea and prove it!"

CHAPTER XXI

THEODORA does not want a "tea," but with her usual discernment, she perceives my desire to be actively asserting her attractions, and she puts her arms around me and assures me that she wishes me to do as I think best.

By dint of the energy of years, and by tapping my creditors with a fillip of cash, my head is above the dung-hill of debt.

For years mine have been the drops on the stone of forbearance, and instead of the constant dripping wearing away the stone it has crystallized in a queer sort of confidence which has made a bond between me and my creditors. They like my unvarying periodicity. They seem to prefer various and

protracted nibbles to one good gulp of ex-trication.

So—for Theodora's tea, I do not lack for depots of supplies.

Like the inebriate whose pledge is out, I plunge into this fit of worldliness with a strange and ghastly energy. It was at first like a good square meal after the leanness of a conscientious Lent.

I could have shaken Theodora for her faithful but unenthusiastic assistance. And again and again I fought with Cousin Gertrude's fiat—"she hasn't got 'it'." She has "IT"—of course she has; and I am going to make "IT" so plain that Cousin Gertrude cannot miss "IT," even with her intentionally blind and utterly unfocused cold blue eyes.

Consider, all ye who mind to give a tea! Of all the ineffectual social performances,

commend me to it! The invitations are so generous that nobody feels specially complimented; but at the same time if, by a perverse fate, one remote human acquaintance is overlooked, there is an enemy to strike you in the hinder parts for the rest of your natural life. I know such an one—now in the flesh, and unlikely to be out of it for many a day. Again—of all the dreary farces to the central figures, a tea is the veriest. It is for them in their “Solomon’s glory,” a hurried greeting and a quick goodbye—and for the most part they stand with aching feet and anxious hearts—remote and listless—while forests of hats and feathers and cataracts of unintelligible talk make a mocking Babel. The creation of chicken salad and questionable punch would be arduous and drear but for the prophecy of the *climax*—when those who are bidden, and

who do not pray to have themselves excused, forget salad and punch for the vision of Theodora. Theodora the lovely—compelling climax.

The fatal evening arrives; and I—a fool—swallow all of the memorial and vapid falsehoods—the vain repetitions of centuries of social deceit. “Your daughter is lovely”; “She’ll make havoc with those eyes”; “She’s decidedly the prettiest debutante”—(this is a psalter prepared especially for the debutante’s mother) and I smile and smile. Smiles antiphonal with duplicity—triplicity—quatraplicity. What a farce!

Theodora wouldn’t talk, but I was a wonder to myself. Like old wine, I had mellowed among the cobwebs of my soul. I had on a good dress—I was still slender, and I wore violets—*me!* Mr. Beverley sent them to me. It has been ages since any-

body sent me flowers for my bosom. Flowers for vases for the house to enjoy I had received, but not an essentially personal and very unusual nosegay. My neck was bare, and I felt as if I were a trifle immodest for my years, but my intimate friends tapped my neck with their fans and said it was just as pretty as Theodora's. It *was* plumper—and just as white. In the evening we had men and young girls. In fancy, I saw them bending and crowding around Theodora unwilling to tear themselves away, and clamoring for her company at Germans, the theater and the coming football game. But not so. The punch bowl was an atom obscured by circles of spike-tail fortifications, and oyster patés and cold ham were apotheosized instead of my weary Theodora.

When the festivities had proceeded as far as possible, and my child and I sunk upon

a sofa, wordless and forlorn, we experienced the verity of what is known as "a *gone* feeling." Everybody had "gone"—and so had our vitality—our remnant of social "*spunk*."

"I can never—whatever else assails me—have another coming-out party, can I, mamma? I have had my one and only *début*, haven't I?" Theodora asked. She seemed at last to have found her tongue.

"I can't see how it could have been lovelier," I replied, still game. "Everybody was as nice as possible to you."

"Yes; just as nice as *possible* to me," said Theodora, kissing me tenderly but wearily, as she trailed off to bed.

I sat on in the old winged chair with all the lights out save one just behind me. The violets in their purple sweetness were fresh on my breast; but their fragrance was sad.

It was as if we had had another funeral.

I was encased in inelastic disappointment. I had had another Waterloo.

I heard a step coming deliberately down stairs and along the hall toward the library door, and there stood Leonard Beverley in his evening clothes—come to ask me for Theodora?—

Wait a minute till I get my breath! His attitude was humbly interrogatory.

“Come in,” I said simply. He walked in with a beautiful confidence and took his seat beside me. “You wore my flowers,” he began, “and thereby gave me joy. I have been afraid to lay my humble confession upon your sacred dignity; but you wore my flowers, you consented to my first attention, and it is vain to wait any longer. I have been here for years. I know you and I love you! Won’t you be my wife? Won’t you

permit me to lift you from your heroic sacrifices?

"I think I will be a tender and indulgent husband. You shall never have an unfulfilled desire if I can help it. I love you—is not that enough?"

I had grown to my old winged chair. The picture of my oldest grandmother for centuries bound to a red velvet chair, was not as fixed as *I*. I was simply paralyzed by astonishment. I could not speak.

Still, I must confess—for this is a candid story—within my breast were tentacles of emotion.

In the remote cells of my being, during my long widowhood, had passed shadows of human passion, but I had turned my inner eye ever from the shadow—the forecursor—because I did not think it chaste. Now the words of a man, whom—before God—I only



"You wore my flowers," he said.

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counted as a friend—had set in motion the tiny mysterious rills of sex which I thought dead. I was conscious of a curious tingling, a glimpse of release, but I pulled myself from the old winged chair to shake off the tempter, and stood before Leonard Beverley whose eyes were still upon me. There was exalted exhortation in his face. I stood rigid.

“You have astonished me,” I said slowly. “I am too tired to-night to think. But as you are true and sincere, so shall I be. I will give you my answer as soon as I can.”

As I climbed the stair, I could feel the glow of his kind eyes lighting me on my way.

CHAPTER XXII

A TEA to a girl who hasn't "IT," possesses the qualities of a bread pill. Indeed, I shall take the liberty of calling it a bread pill. For a moment it allays apprehension and quickens hope—but it fails to reach the spot.

If a girl has "IT," she needs no tea. "IT" is quickly perceived, and generously accepted.

"Coming-outs" are trumpets of no uncertain sound. The prelude—tea and crackers—calls the ladies gently, but the prelude grows; the peals become loud and strident.

Punch — Ham — Patés — Men! Men!
Men!

Who hearken or not just as they please. It depends upon how hungry they are.

Yet what can a scuffler do for her child,
but give her a tea—a bread pill?

The day of Phyllis and a dozen Corydons is past; Corydon has become wary and impulseless; where the pot boils the strongest, there Corydon stays the longest. Corydon is wary and so is Phyllis—for *that*.

The Sunday evening after our bread pill, Calline never moved from the door. She stood in her extreme waitress propriety, and held her tray with too evident pleasure. Theodora, in trailing gray, reacted upon her guests like frost upon a bed of coarse zinnias. She had no small-talk, no coquetry—and the men departing, banged the door with a sigh of relief; shook the icicles of her presence from their adjustable memories and never returned. None indeed, but Dan Wickens and Benjie Deane.

Dan will go to see anybody who will let

him prate of himself—and Theodora is polite.

Benjie is known only through the Social Register which proclaims him a clubman, lawyer and descendant of Patrick Henry. To the world at large he is only a stammerer and a fool. He has been buffeted by each succeeding crop of debutantes, but like a silly guinea cock, he does know how to run to cover—which is now 214 Benjamin Street.

Is this Theodora's booty? God forbid!

The winter of expectation is a winter of discontent. Theodora has not been asked to go anywhere but to the theater with the aforesaid young gentlemen, and each time she sat upstairs.

I hate the girls who get attention. They are not to be compared to Theodora. I crouch before the majesty of dancing men; theirs is indeed the kingdom of a young

girl's heaven. Is it not hard to be made or marred by their poor favor?

For the life of me I cannot tell what is the matter with Theodora, but if I should marry Leonard Beverley, what a difference to her! Carriages and dinners, and the like! Potential accessories!

I believe that Leonard Beverley's love is of sense and soul—the good old-fashioned kind. It seems queer for one of his age, but he has never married; that makes a difference, and he is only forty-five. I am, of course, a respectable middle-aged widow whose heart should be hardened to her years.

Is forty middle-aged? Few attain the limit of eighty years, and forty verily is five years more than half of that fearful three score and ten; therefore, I am middle-aged—but “entre nous” I do not feel it!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE moon shines wonderfully to-night
—so white and still.

Miss Arabella is sick; indeed she has been for six months, with a fearful sickness, and I have tried to nurse her as faithfully as if she were rich and comely. She sleeps fitfully; but when she dozes off, I seem to forget all which is immediate, and my thoughts dive into the purple ocean of a past life. I am borne back to the old inconsequent days on the wings of this wonderful moonlight. All through the span of scuffles I can cross my heart (as Sandy used to do) and say: "I have tried—tried—tried to do my best," and the best to-night is only articulate in poor Miss Arabella. She has been the clear peal of a dozen years to which I

have always listened; poor, ill—almost friendless—she seems; and whenever I have taken her money it has been the price of blood and an awful oblation to my helpless necessity. I have not taken any for three whole months. I just couldn't—it was like filching silver from dead men's eyes. To-night her room smells sick, and I turn to the moonlight for consolation, and I behold lines of moving pictures—pictures of a life.

What a great, strange thing is a human life!

To-morrow morning I am going to answer Leonard Beverley, and I am making up my mind to the moonlight.

The sill curtains are swaying in the chambers over the way, and the ampelopsis rustles like a silken gown.

One spot on the house opposite is bare, and the vine has sent out shoots which run

crooked like paths across a well-walked field.

The rhododendrons gleam white in the yard of the Woman's Club, and the moon-flowers are like near stars on the house of the "ladies-of-the-fan."

The moonlight cuts like a silver lance through the shadows of the night. Yonder are two skulking dogs, lean and dirty, telling each other the secrets of their life, and a poor cat sliding stealthily along. For shame! the shabby dogs are after her, and she darts up the great linden—the only survivor of a double row which once ran up Benjamin Street. I have given Miss Arabella a glass of water, she sleeps again stertorously, and I take up my thought like a dropped stitch.

Mr. Beverley would save me and Theodora too, perhaps. No more butcher bills! No collector-man! Fires! Clothes! A

Motor Car! Horses, if need be! Membership in Clubs! Dinners! Trips! Travel! Consideration from this big, cold world!

Theodora safe.—What a temptation! My blood runs quicker for these thoughts. Leonard Beverley is rich and good, and his white love is mine.

His touch would be solace, his companionship balm to my loneliness.

The woman in me expands and answers his call. I know wedlock; much of it is sweet—maybe all would be sweet with Leonard Beverley.

A train of moving pictures comes and goes on the soft white moon; and I ask earth—moon—God— What shall I do? Shall I harken to the heart or the head?

And the white night pauses as if about to answer. And I listen—my face in my hands—my elbow on the window-sill.

I listen—I listen to the argument of the years.

Earth—moon—God—keep silent.

A train of moving pictures comes on the wings of the moon. Years roll back—back in gloomy eloquence.

A little boy and a little girl are picking roses in a tangled garden. A little bare-footed boy and girl. The girl is six, the boy is eight. Suddenly the boy runs to a bush and plucks a ripe, purple fig; and looking at the girl with dark-lashed blue eyes, he whispers: “Here! you my ‘feet-heart!’ ”

Neither understands, but the girl eats the fig and chuckles with delight, as she goes in the house with her apron full of roses. Years go by and the moving pictures pass on the moonbeam—the talking pictures! They are in school—this boy and girl—and all around, the naughty children are calling

one another sweetheart, after the manner of immemorial innocence. It is a shabby old-fashioned school, with all the neighborhood boys and girls.

"Who is your sweetheart?" a pert boy asks a little girl, and the little girl ducks her head, blushes violently, and answers, "Nobody."

Presently she feels a timid nudge, and turns to face a little boy who hands her his slate. On it she reads, "You are my sweetheart." The little boy can manage his *SS* now.

The teacher's awful eyes perceive the tender offering, and he demands the slate, which the little girl surrenders most unwillingly; and then—shame on you, unsympathetic master—the teacher reads aloud the ill-written words, and the little girl sobs audibly, while the boy jumps up, and cries:

"I meant it—I meant it—and you can't rub *that* out!"

His daring young declaration dries the girl's tears, and somewhat relieves her trembling embarrassment.

At Christmas, the boy sends the girl a box of candy, and on the inside of the glass box top is pasted a bit of paper on which is written clumsily:

"I'll roam the wide earth over, With thee my Theodora."

Sweet—awkward—unsymphonious sentiment! But it pleased the little girl in an unintelligible way, and charged her atmosphere mysteriously with expectation and sex. She didn't understand.

When the little girl is fourteen, the boys give a dance at the Court House, and all the little girls consult together, and decide in their young crudity to present the boys with

a favor, a sort of acknowledgment and appreciation of their desire to please them.

They could procure nothing in those stinted country stores but some tin stars—perhaps intended for the brooches of humble females. These they bought, and at the beginning of the festive evening each girl pinned a star upon the lapel of her favorite's jacket. Wonderful and unexpected attention! The little boy of the fig and the slate whirled and chased with the girl of the tears—danced and laughed through those exquisite hours of wonderment which hover on the borderland of womanhood and manhood. I—Theodora Threshley—the child of smiles and tears—the woman of many tears, see it all so plain to-night.

At eighteen, I walked again in the same old garden where roses grew and the purple figs—the moon shone as it does to-night;

every sweet thing on earth was blooming.

A seat ran around the huge magnolia starred with great, white passionless flowers.

The night—a majestic sentinel—guarded a great ceremony which was heralded in the girl's soul by the sweetest, strangest, holiest feelings.

Julian and I sat long and silent. He felt—*I think*—I felt, I know—every sacred emotion in the register of passion. At last he spoke. His words are distinct to-night, clear and musical; they make my blood tingle as I sit so still and gaze into the mysteries of the moonlight.

Youth and maiden are soon wrapt in the innocent and absorbing joy of an uttered, "I love you!"

The "sweet" of life is as thick as the fragrance of the magnolia flowers distilled by night and moonlight. The maiden's lips,

her hair, her throat, her arms—no longer her's, but *his*.

The riot of exalted love is deliciously exhausting, and I enter the great house overcome with joy.

That picture fades, and another comes on the moonbeams; a "Corot" hangs beneath the steely sky.

It is May day, and upon its laughing pinks and green, stands an old church (Sandy lies near it) and in the church is a marriage bell. It has been fashioned by giggling country lasses—a band of fresh girl friends rejoicing in the name of bridesmaids. Then I see a typical country feast, not only of viands and confections, but of unstinted love and interest. I can almost realize this moment the joyful fact that he and I are going off into a perfect world—our very own—a wedding journey with its

precious anticipation—its dread and joy.

Another vivid picture gleams on the moonlight—a husband brimful of solicitude—of joy—of passion. I to-night am once more on a journey by water, where his very eyes are blue skies, blue seas, blue everything that is best.

Another picture! Months of sacred expectation and Theodora at last. Then Frank and Sandy and Matt! Ups and downs—disappointments, but ever love.

Within the visible world was an invisible and tremendous world where I—he—and his dwelt all alone; a precious, God-given and often painful world—but still, *our very own*.

I have rejoiced; I have been sweetheart, wife, mother. He with all his weaknesses has gone before—the husband of me—his one wife. He has gone trailing nebulously

along the years from me to God—like yon milky way crawling across the moonlit heavens.

In Heaven no marriage?—

Because the body is spiritual?—

But will not my spirit meet Julian's spirit in some peculiar way? Will we not again take up the beautiful suspended life sealed with my soul on the bench under the magnolia tree?

My soul and body were pledged long ago. A divided heart—a divided body make a broken sonata. I like harmony; I hear the melody of unbroken widowhood. In my own blessed little world with all of its care—no one must enter but Julian and Julian's children. There cannot be two romances in one flesh!

On the moon now comes another picture. I see a tall form—limp and pale—with blue

eyes half closed, and I hear a voice—these words—“Theodora, don’t leave me!” and I stand up and cry aloud, “No, Julian, I never will. I will not sully my fidelity. I will not take one tittle of my interest from your children!” Middle age and marriage are inartistic. To consider it, is sacrilege to the spirit of the magnolia tree and the strange old garden.

Miss Arabella cut off my musings. She wanted water—a cup of cold water, which I give in His name. As I darted along the passage with this cup of cold water which I was giving in His name, I met Mr. Beverley. He was keeping watch with me, and I forgot my shabby wrapper, my long plaits hanging down—I stopped and gave him my answer quick, lest I should repent.

.

Miss Arabella gets worse and worse. I

minister to her night and day. Much is blurred; I cannot see all things plainly—but Christ speaks to me in the night season: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto her, ye have done it unto Me.”

It isn't our plans, our hopes, our stumbling blocks—we are all moving with destiny. It is, after all, whether we have given the cup of cold water in His name.

CHAPTER XXIV

I FEEL so sorry for Theodora. She looks pestered, but she says nothing. Is she grieving over my disappointment at her social failure? Poor child! Lately her sweet mysterious eyes have looked piteously pleading; they have somewhat the look of Beppo's eyes when I reproached him for the beef. I have tried never to reproach Theodora. We are as God made us—I suppose; but I don't like the hungry look in Theodora's eyes—those eyes of sea and sky and wood and vale and all their mysteries—those mottled loving eyes!

Scuffles have been worse than ever this summer. Market brings forth both courage and despair. Nothing is cheap but cab-

bage, and nobody will eat them but Quetta and Calline.

It was very hot this morning, and I returned home desperate over my unusual expenditure. The life of some is simply a jumping up and down on the very same spot; it is the life of me—the scuffer—jump—jump—jump right here and no further. I wanted Theodora and asked Calline for her, who quickly informed me:

“Miss ‘The’ shet herself up soon attter you lef’, an’ I ain’t hear a soun’ sence.”

In a moment I remembered how restless Theodora was all yesterday, and how when I woke her up this morning, she mumbled half asleep: “The last day! the last day!” Was this difficult life too much for her gentleness?

I went to Theodora’s room. The door was locked, but when I called her she quickly

opened it. Her action was queer, and at first I was really frightened, for Theodora was transfigured. She was a luminous angel who had dropped her cross.

“What, Theodora? What, my darling? What is the matter?”

Her lips were a-quiver; her eyes of wonderful light were full of mist, but behind the mist was something very bright.

She threw her arms around my neck—Theodora was not usually demonstrative—and whispered: “Jenifer is coming—Mother—Jenifer is coming home—to—me!”

How strange!

Jenifer had made his confession in the corner with the cribbage; but Theodora—sixteen—was wise. He must prove himself; he must wait two years to find out—to be certain. In two weeks, Jenifer, just twenty-one, was coming for Theodora. Of

course now I understood why men did not care for my beautiful Theodora. She had altogether restrained herself. She was afraid they might brush the down from the very least of Jenifer's privileges. She was saving her words—her very smiles—for him.

My! We will throw a bomb soon which will fairly splinter old Benjamin Street.

I began to sing: "Now, Lord, lettest Thou thy servant—" but not yet. I still have Frank; poor Frank and Matt—and Miss Arabella, Quetta and Calline for whom to scuffle.

Theodora always had "IT"—unlimited "IT," and I'm so glad. The divine quality now shines, scintillates, bewitches me. She is coy, coquettish—delicious.

She kept all for Jenifer.

She guarded her Eden with the flaming sword of absolute reserve, lest temptation enter therein.

CHAPTER XXV

THEODORA and Jenifer are gone. They are in the heart of the delectable land. Theodora is myself twenty years ago. What pity there is shadow in delectable land; or is it best it is so?

Leonard Beverley is gone too; gone to Buckleigh where the roses grew and the memorial fig.

It is strange that he chose the spot so full of memories of me! And he has taken Frank with him—poor, wayward, unstable Frank! God's fields, and Leonard Beverley's counsel, may bring Frank to see his divine self—the pilot of his destiny.

Matt alone is here with me; going his faithful, unimaginative way. He will

never hurt me with infidelity to his daily task.

Miss Arabella Vanderslice is the illest person in the world. She can't afford a nurse; and Quetta and I minister to her through the awfullest disease; the other creature which St. Paul tells us shall not keep us from the love of God.

She calls me "child" now. She has experienced the sweet of mother love—through me.

This morning when I went up after my morning scuffles, she held in her transparent hand a lot of little paper slips.

I wondered what they were, but I didn't ask Miss Arabella; she tells me what she wishes me to know. When the doctor came, she gave these slips to him, and feebly informed him: "Tickets—for—heirs—name—number—article—marked—on slip—and—

on—ar—ti—cle.” Pathetic little testament!

Heirs and Miss Arabella forsooth! Her latest mental delusion. After a while, she mumbled: “No—confusion—about—my—things.”

What things? Later in the day, she turned her face to the wall and died suddenly and quietly as one of her faith and patience should do.

Her keys were clasped in her poor shriveled hand, and we found a note in her top bureau drawer. It ran:

“The tags will identify legacies with legatees. Nothing must be disturbed for one month after my decease. My funeral procession must go by the penitentiary, and I desire that the convicts may be permitted to see it, that they may realize that where I am, they may be also—through repentance.

“This I desire for the sake of my father

who taught the convicts for forty years—every Sunday.

“Eight carriages must be hired for the funeral, and in the one next my body must ride Theodora Threshley and Leonard Beverley.”

This, of course, I declined to do.

In a tin box was enough money to defray the expenses of this unique funeral.

CHAPTER XXVI

MY breath is taken away—gone for good, I know. My old orthodox breath will never course in its usual way through my thin nostrils.

Everybody has received his tag; the little work-table, the funny old mirror, the various brooches and trinkets have gone to the blood kin of Miss Arabella, and my tag (will wonders, never cease?) drew money; good pure gold and silver—no 16 to 1—and plenty of it. How could I ever catch my very same breath?

I have had rich experiences; but no arch and purposeful deceiver like Miss Arabella Vanderslice has ever crossed my path. While I was scuffling to decide who would

bury her, but myself—she was experiencing a weird sort of glee over her funeral surprise party. The idea of Miss Arabella and fun, is queer; yet, of course (and I cannot deny it), it is some sort of fun for me.

I am like a boy who has been in a plaster cast for months—years; the plaster is removed but I walk stumbingly. I don't know my way well, yet I am scuffling to the seats of the money changers; to the places of those who buy and sell dry goods and groceries. I distinctly hear the divine command: "Pay what thou owest. Owe no man anything, but love one another and so fulfill the law!"

I obey.

I have been stitching; stitching on the garment of life; pulling out, putting in, turning—twisting—patching—darning.

It has been from the beginning—stitch,

stitch; scuffle, scuffle. Lo, the garment is assuming definite proportions.

The pilgrim's burdens are falling from her shoulders. One rough path of life is ended. The rough path ran up a hill. I see it plain; as I stand on the promontory of easy circumstances I can see all of its peculiar deviations. Did my soul grow with the rough journey? If not, it is bad. I can see the path below and I also know that another path runs higher up the hill. Has the rough path made me strong for the easier road? If not, it is bad.

One rough, briery path is ended, and there is toll for the other gates. Toll of coins? Yea—how about the courage, endurance, resistance, love? These are needful even now.

Scuffles for bread are ended, but perhaps the scuffles of the soul are only but begun.

Strange humanity! I am lonesome for my well known scuffles. I am in a rare atmosphere to which I am not yet adjusted. It is lonesome on the promontory of easy circumstances. I miss Miss Arabella. I have no heart my very own to yield me sympathy. The garment of life is too big for me alone—the great flowing patchwork of existence.

I seem to belong especially to nobody but my unconfidential Matt—my good, earnest little boy.

Ah, me! I am a moving picture, and Life—the cunning old painter—has always treated me artistically.

Is there no contentment? Is flesh ever restless? I have what I desired, yet there seems something else to wish for. I am lonely—very, very lonely on the promontory of easy circumstance.

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Who is at the corner talking to my "lady-of-the-fan?" He looks like Leonard Beverley. Can he be coming here? I think not. He is never one to press a disagreeable subject. He knows he would find me of the same mind. *He knows that.*

Isn't that the bell? Isn't that Calline plunging up the stair? Is it? Is it?

"Miss The!"

"Yes, Calline." The girl is panting from excitement. "What is it?"

"Miss The! Mist Buvley—here—in de house: he say 'Is you in?' I say 'Yes.' Come on Miss The.—Makase!"

I arise and look in the glass. O—middle age!

I run the comb close to my scalp and loosen the thick brown waves. Not one white hair among them.

I pick up the powder puff and put a

smudge on the end of my nose, and pat it in. I do not need it. And then—then—I—(I hate to tell it, but this is a “ ’cross my heart” story) I give my cheeks a little pinch. Then I seemed to remember my widowed self, and I sternly opened the bureau drawer and got out cuffs. I had discarded them; but suddenly I felt the need of them—so I put them on for dignity—for protection—for firmness. No one could waver in cuffs.

“Miss The!”—There’s Calline again.
“Mist Buvley is waitin’ for you in de parlor.”

“Yes, Calline. I’m coming. I’ll be down in a minute.”

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